DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 316 CE 082 448

AUTHOR Falk, Ian; Golding, Barry; Balatti, Josephine
TITLE Building Communities: ACE, Lifelong Learning and Social Capital. An Anthology of Word Portraits Reporting Research Conducted for the Adult, Community and Further Education Board.
INSTITUTION Tasmania Univ., Launceston (Australia). Center for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.
SPONS AGENCY Adult, Community, and Further Education Board, Melbourne (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-0-7311-1824-3
PUB DATE 2000-06-15
NOTE 107p.
AVAILABLE FROM ARIS, Language Australia, GPO Box 372F, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Tel: 61-3-9926-4794, Fax: 61-3-9926-4780, e-mail: davet@la.ames.vic.edu.au; Web site: http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia/acfech. For full text: http://www.acfe.vic.gov.au/publications/building%20communities/.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Adult Literacy; *Community Benefits; Community Development; Community Education; Community Involvement; Developed Nations; Disabilities; Disadvantaged; *Educational Benefits; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; *Lifelong Learning; Literacy Education; Older Adults; Out of School Youth; Popular Education; Rural Population; School Community Relationship; Small Businesses; *Social Capital; Social Values; Well Being; Womens Education; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Learning Communities; *Marginalized Groups

ABSTRACT

The 10 portraits, or case studies, in this book are intended to show how locally-owned adult education turns everyday learning into social and economic well-being. Taken alone, each portrait tries to give a particular insight into the daily transformation of adults and their local communities. Together, the group portrait shows how strongly adult and community education (ACE) is growing the community asset called, social capital. An introduction sketches in the theoretical frameworks used to interpret the portraits; describes the process used to gather the information that forms the portraits; and summarizes the portraits, showing their locations, programs, people, and social and economic well-being they generate. The portraits are: "A Learning Community Builds Social Capital: Ballarat East Community House" (Barry Golding); "Make Connections and Move On: African Women's Project, Maribyrnong Community Centre" (Josephine Balatti); "Partnership with Business Builds Social Capital: Colac ACE and Industry Training Networks" (Josephine Balatti); "Connecting Young Koories to Their Community: Coorong Tongala Course, Robinvale Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group" (Barry Golding); "Wellbeing of Marginalized Young People: Future Connections, Bendigo (Barry Golding); "Wellbeing of Aboriginal Elders: Aboriginal Oral History Project, Aboriginal Community Elders Services,

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

Brunswick Consultative Group" (Barry Golding); "I Give Back: Bonds, Bridges, and Reciprocity, Cheltenham Neighborhood House" (Ian Falk); "'We Are the Community': Transformations of Identity in the Hawthorn Community Education Project" (Ian Falk); "Connected: Rural Women Build Social Cohesion through Literacy, Cobram Community House" (CRLRA with Barry Golding); and "Leadership in a Rural Region: Gippsland Community Leadership Program, SCOPE Quality, Learning Morwell" (CRLRA with Barry Golding, Josepine Balatti). A conclusion, "Building Communities: ACE, Lifelong Learning, and Social Capital" (Ian Falk, Josephine Balatti), highlights what was learned. Demographic maps are appended. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 316

Building Communities

ACE, Lifelong Learning and S[illegible]tal

An anthology of word portraits reporting rese[illegible]
Adult, Community and Further Education Boa[illegible]

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Hagston

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

2

Adult Education in the Community

Building Communities

ACE, Lifelong Learning and Social Capital

An anthology of word portraits reporting research conducted for the Adult, Community and Further Education Board

by the
Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia
University of Tasmania Launceston

Ian Falk
Barry Golding
Josephine Balatti

Writers
Ian Falk
Barry Golding
Josephine Balatti

Management
Adult, Community and Further Education Board, Victoria

© State of Victoria
First Edition, June 2000-06-15
Published by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board, Victoria. Copyright in this document is owned by the State of Victoria. No parts may be reproduced by any process except with the express written permission of the Attorney-General for the State of Victoria or a person acting under his authority or in accordance with the Copyright Act.

ISBN 0-7311-1824-3

All inquiries in relation to this publication should be addressed to:
Adult, Community and Further Education Division
Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment
2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne

Additional copies can be obtained from:
ARIS
Language Australia
GPO Box 372F
Melbourne VIC 3001
http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia/acfech

Contents

Executive Summary vii

Introduction Impact of ACE on wellbeing *(Ian Falk)* xi

1 **A learning community builds social capital:** Ballarat East Community House *(Barry Golding)* 1

2 **Make connections and move on:** African Women's Project, Maribyrnong Community Centre *(Josephine Balatti)* 7

3 **Partnership with business builds social capital:** Colac ACE and industry training networks *(Josephine Balatti)* 15

4 **Connecting young Koories to their community:** Coorong Tongala Course, Robinvale Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group *(Barry Golding)* 23

5 **Wellbeing of marginalised young people:** Future Connections, Bendigo *(Barry Golding)* 31

6 **Wellbeing of Aboriginal elders:** Aboriginal Oral History Project, Aboriginal Community Elders Services, Brunswick *(Barry Golding)* 39

7 **I give back:** Bonds, bridges and reciprocity in ACE, Cheltenham Neighbourhood House *(Ian Falk)* 47

8 **'We *are* the community':** Transformations of identity in the Hawthorn Community Education Project (HCEP) *(Ian Falk)* 55

9 **Connected:** Cobram rural women build social cohesion through literacy, Cobram Community House, Cobram *(CRLRA with Barry Golding)* 61

10 **Leadership in a rural region:** Gippsland Community Leadership Program, SCOPE Quality Learning Inc., Morwell *(CRLRA with Barry Golding and Josephine Balatti)* 69

Conclusion Building communities: ACE, lifelong learning and social capital *(Ian Falk and Josephine Balatti)* 77

Appendix: Demographic maps 83

Map 1 Maribyrnong 84
Map 2 Robinvale 85
Map 3 Bendigo 86
Map 4 Brunswick 87
Map 5 Cheltenham 88
Map 6 Hawthorn 89
Map 7 Cobram 90

[Note: No map is provided for Ballarat, Gippsland or Colac]

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to acknowledge the Adult, Community and Further Education Board and the Advisory Committee who developed the brief and guided the project in providing valuable feedback and advice.

Our special thanks go to the very many participants at the ten sites who so willingly told their stories about ACE experiences and hence allowed the narratives to be brought to life. The coordinators at the sites were additionally generous in the help they gave setting up interviews at the sites, and, along with many participants, in their checking of drafts of the case portraits.

We would also like to thank the following people for their contribution to this project:

- Diana Kendall for her work as a research assistant.
- Susan Johns and Margaret Kreft for the copyediting and formatting of this report.
- Dr John MacIntyre (Director, Research Centre for VET, UTS, Sydney) for the preparation of the demographic maps in the Appendix.
- Helen Macrae for final editing of this report.
- Bron Power, Deborah Wagner and Lamanda Harris, for their administrative support throughout the project.

PREFACE

In 1999 the ACFE Board launched the first further education conceptual framework produced in Australia under the title *Transforming Lives Transforming Communities*. The transformation of lives through learning occurs both within the adult community education sector and within the wider training system. That adult education in the community can transform lives and transform communities may have appeared to the uninitiated to be a bold claim. The ten community portraits contained in this publication leave no doubt that the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector in Victoria does just that, unobtrusively, routinely and consistently.

Those close to adult community education have known for a very long time that ACE does more than deliver student contact hours or churn out students having attained competency in one or other discipline. The new social policy framework associated with the generation of social capital provided a set of tools to begin to capture and represent in a rigorous way some of the transformational strengths of the ACE sector for individuals and their communities.

The authors of this report state "Social capital is the cement of society's goodwill – it creates a cohesive society. ....Social capital provides the social infrastructure support for our lives as we move about in a web of elastic networks connecting home , work, learning, leisure and public life...the interactions that create social capital, are the same interactions that give our lives their distinctive sociocultural landscape."

The sociocultural landscapes of the lives rendered in the ten community portraits drawn in this research are transfigured by their contact with ACE. At least one of the major findings of this research is quite stunning – it is that *"building social capital is not an incidental by-product of the way ACE providers operate. Building social capital is the modus operandi of the sector."* The finding is stunning because it dramatically underlines the extent to which adult community education is not so much a cost to Government as an extraordinarily potent investment in social cohesion, community integration and the preservation and regeneration of that which is positive in Victoria's sociocultural landscape. The claims are dramatic but are borne out by the experiences of the individuals whose voices speak through these portraits as clearly and as compellingly as if they were in our own homes.

This compendium of portraits is filled with examples of changed lives.

The ACFE Board set out to capture the invisible benefits of ACE, the benefits which extend beyond a man learning to read in middle age, beyond a woman of middle age completing her VCE at a neighbourhood learning centre and entering university to fulfill a deeply nursed dream, beyond the merely educational, remarkable though these educational achievements frequently are. This compendium of ACE community portraits largely achieves these objectives. The benefits are vast. The profiles demonstrate that ACE has a tangible impact on the OECD indicators which effect people's capacity to: enhance their social and physical environment; improve

their health; shore up their personal safety; better use their time and leisure; improve their employment options and the quality of their working lives; strengthen their command over and more expertly use goods and services; as well as improving their educational levels.

In the introductory chapter of this publication it is claimed that "Suddenly [social capital's] time has come." The ACFE Board hopes that the time has also come for a new recognition of the power of adult community education to enhance the lives of individuals and their communities. Whether or not this recognition is forthcoming from beyond the boundaries of the ACE sector, it is a consciousness which will certainly inform the policy and practice of the ACFE Board into the future.

Adult, Community and Further Education Board
Melbourne
2000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the project

Does Adult and Community Education (ACE) contribute to the social capital of communities, and thus to socioeconomic wellbeing? Social capital is the cement of society's goodwill - it creates a cohesive society. That is, the interactions that create social capital give our lives their distinctive socio-cultural shape.

The Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFE Board) in Victoria commissioned a research project comprising ten case studies. The anthology shows that ACE:

- generates social capital;
- builds lifelong learning;
- channels the work of volunteers;
- augments social cohesion, citizenship and democratic participation; and
- improves the health of individuals and communities.

The ten portraits of ACE in the anthology show ACE going about its daily work in over 500 communities across Victoria, turning everyday lifelong learning into social and economic wellbeing. To gauge impact on wellbeing, the project used eight OECD Social Indicators: Health, Education and learning, Employment and quality of working life, Time and leisure, Command over goods and services, Physical environment, Social environment, and Personal safety.

Methodology

The methodology constructed a set of Instrumental Case studies[1] reported as research narrative in ten distinctive 'portraits'. Each portrait is unique yet representative of ACE. Each tries to capture the context and rationale for the educational work going on. The set of ten case studies is book-ended by a theoretical exposition and a concluding synthesis. The project documents the ways in which ACE transforms people and their communities.

About [illegible] (word [illegible]

The table below outlines the main theme and the issues addressed in each of the ten sites.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 1: *Showing sites, regions, provider, client focus, social capital elements and OECD indicator bands*

Chapter Number & location	ACFE Region	Provider	Client group focus	Social capital element/s	Wellbeing dimension/s
1 Ballarat East	Central Highlands Wimmera	Ballarat East Community House	Unemployed and disabled people	Reciprocity, trust, networks	Health, Social environment, Education & learning
2 Maribyrnong	Central Western Metropolitan	Maribyrnong Community Centre	Horn of Africa women refugees	Networks, trust	Health, Social environment, Command over goods & services, Education & learning
3 Colac	Barwon South Western	Colac ACE	Business & workers	Partnerships, networks	Employment & quality of working life, Education & learning
4 Robinvale	Loddon Campaspe Mallee	Robinvale LAECG	Koorie youth	Norms, trust	Education & learning, Employment, Social environment
5 Bendigo	Loddon Campaspe Mallee	Future Connections	Youth at risk	Networks, trust	Personal safety, Health, Education & learning, Social environment
6 Brunswick	Northern Metropolitan	Aboriginal Community Elders Service	Koorie Elders	Historicity, trust	Health, Social environment, Personal safety, Education & learning
7 Cheltenham	Southern Western Port	Cheltenham Neighbourhood House	Migrants & special groups	Reciprocity, identity, bonding & bridging ties	Employment, Command over goods and services, Physical environment, Education & learning
8 Hawthorn	Eastern Metropolitan	Hawthorn Community Education Centre	Senior citizens	Identity, trust and self confidence	Health, Education & learning, Time & leisure, Personal safety, Command over goods and services
9 Cobram	Goulburn Ovens Murray	Cobram Community House	Rural women	Personal trust, networking	Command over goods and services, Social environment, Education & learning, Employment & quality of working life
10 Morwell	Gippsland	SCOPE	Community leaders	Trust, externality, community networking	All

Findings and conclusions

ACE augments the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities

The study shows that the social and economic benefits of ACE are inseparable. There is no example of an ACE program that produces economic outcomes alone, or social outcomes alone. Social connectedness comes first; socioeconomic benefits follow.

In Hawthorn educationally disadvantaged older people learn to trust ACE, their health and wellbeing improves, and their reliance on health services drops.

In Colac businesses come together in training networks and more training happens, more cost effectively.

In Robinvale and Bendigo alienated young people develop self-confidence and expect to find work. A Bendigo boy has abandoned, "Burgs and doing over taxis just to get money for drugs and shit", in favour of education.

In Ballarat a "snotty nosed spoilt little mongrel" (his words) in a wheelchair is talked through his pain and stress and "stupid" behaviour, and comes out the other side hopeful of a more fulfilling job as a social worker.

Second: ACE builds social capital

Social capital involves the building of social values, networks and trust. In every ACE site these elements are richly present. ACE learning builds social capital at the meso level (groups, networks and community) and at the micro (individual) level. ACE's capacity to build social capital at the macro, or broad societal level, was not investigated, but can be inferred.

ACE builds social capital at the meso level. The meso level of communities includes groups such as organisations, firms, clubs and associations (formal and informal), as well as voluntary groups. Here ACE expands social capital by calling on existing networks and by generating new networks. Social capital production is the *modus operandi* of ACE not a by product. Because ACE brings a spirit of reciprocity to networking, and is intent on lifting the common good of local community, it is a powerful force in the generation of social capital.

In Maribyrnong the African Women's Project calls in known community groups and agencies to help implement the program.

In Brunswick the Aboriginal Community Elders Service draws on a web of Koorie networks in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

In Gippsland SCOPE is the catalyst for a new network of over 100 business and community leaders.

In Cobram the Neighbourhood House turns a women's access group learning literacy and life skills into a network.

ACE builds social capital at the micro level. At the micro level, ACE helps build social capital in individuals and families through education. Through their involvement in ACE, students enter networks, help create new networks and extend their connections. Individual and family benefits translate into community benefits. ACE creates the conditions that encourage individuals to develop the building blocks required for social capital to grow. These building blocks are trust, norms and relationships.

In Brunswick Koorie Elders become storytellers for the generations to come after them through an oral history project.

In Ballarat a woman learns how to read and write. In due course she is elected to the committee of management, and enters into a direct experience of representative democracy.

In Bendigo a young man drops out of petty theft, stops lashing out at others and turns to education, hopeful now of a better future.

In Colac owners of small businesses stop going it alone because they see that networking to set up workplace training is good for business and good for Colac.

In Maribyrnong a woman from the Horn of Africa uses her knowledge of English to get her stolen handbag back.

About 250,000 Victorian adults study in community settings each year. The amount of micro level social capital developed is like leaven in Victorian society.

Third: ACE promotes lifelong learning

Every one learns, more or less, all their lives. Lifelong learners identify as learners. They seek out learning opportunities and are aware of what they learn, how they learn and why they learn. ACE actively 'goes after'

educationally disadvantaged adults who would never think of taking on organised education unless encouraged by others, and would never otherwise think of themselves as students.

In Hawthorn and Cobram adult educators set up informal social situations to make contact and coax reluctant adults into the ACE fold.

In Colac employers respond to ACE initiative and redefine their identity. From sole operators – with limited capacity for training – they become collaborators in a supportive training network with strong bargaining power.

In Maribyrnong women expand their sense of self as refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia to include commonality with other women from the Horn of Africa. As Horn of Africa women they act more broadly to build connections with the Australian community. Identity, knowledge and community twist together indivisibly.

Migrant women in Cheltenham redefine their identities from outsider to insider in the Australian community.

Leaders in Gippsland are asked to shift from narrow perspectives of their immediate community membership to become citizens of the region and the world.

In Ballarat the Internet lets adult education students form communities with people who have common educational ground with them but who live far away. They too have a taste of what it might be like to be a citizen of the world.

In all these examples we see the links in ACE experience between learning, identity transformation and connection to community.

Fourth: Language and literacy practices are a vehicle for transformation

The way language is used is fundamental to success in ACE community development. Networks are only as good as the quality of the linguistic, literate and non-verbal communication used to establish and maintain them. The literate practices, spoken, written and non-verbal, used by coordinators and teachers in ACE are the very mechanisms of transformation.

At the two Koorie sites, Koorie language shapes cultural narratives and transfers values from generation to generation.

In Colac networks are established and maintained by quality communication between provider and businesses, free to take new directions as required.

In Bendigo young people use their language practices to reinforce their emerging trust and confidence in each other, restoring their bruised esteem, readying themselves to move on.

At Cheltenham Neighbourhood House two migrant women are surrounded by language and communication practices reflecting the values of the House.

The ten portraits have few surprises for those who know the ACE sector well. This project set out to document data in patterns that make new meanings for familiar situations. Put together the portraits make a new pattern for all to see the genius of ACE in social capital construction.

1 Stake, R. 1995, *The Art of Case Study Research*, Sage, CA, p. 3.

INTRODUCTION

Impact of ACE on wellbeing

The ten portraits in this book show how locally owned adult education turns everyday learning into social and economic wellbeing. Taken alone, each portrait gives us a particular insight into the daily transformation of adults and their local communities. Put together, the group portrait shows how strongly ACE is growing the community asset we call social capital.

To set the scene we:

- Sketch in the theoretical frameworks we used to interpret the portraits.
- Describe the process we used to gather the information that forms the portraits.
- Summarise the portraits showing their locations, programs, people, and the social and economic well being they generate.

Framework for the portraits

'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder', is how the old expression goes. When we look at a portrait on a canvass or in a photograph the filters in our heads influence a lot of what we see there - colours, textures, size, patterns and so on. Even more powerfully the filters affect the meaning we give to the portrait – its subject, context and content. Writers and readers of these ten written portraits use filters too, as screens through which the discussions, interviews and chats with ACE people are given meaning.

As the writers we consciously used three filters to interpret and explain what we saw and heard. In this chapter *Learning*, *Social Capital*, and *Socioeconomic Wellbeing* are described. In the next ten they are applied. In Chapter 12 they explain our findings.

First filter: Learning

Learning has many forms, many overlapping ways of happening and many names. Each name tries to account for something different and each name means something different to each speaker and listener. There is lifelong learning, transformational learning, skills learning, informal learning, self-directed learning, workplace learning, community learning and so on.

More often than not learning takes place but 'learning' is not used to name what has happened. Learning is so intrinsic to almost everything we do as we go about the world in our daily lives we hardly notice it happening. For example, we call what happens on a netball court 'sport' but in the multitude of interactions on and off the netball court players keep finding out more about netball and better ways of playing the game. New ways of thinking, knowing and doing might come from a formal training session for the netball team, or from actions in the course of a match, or from watching a match on television.

These events are only sometimes called learning but they all move us on by adding to our knowledge and understanding, and by adding to our ability to take effective action in the world. In this anthology, and in ACE in general, learning is understood to come from

exposure to a multitude of experiences and points of view, and from the making of new connections between them. As new experiences, new knowledge and new connections are subjected to critical evaluation, individual learners and learning communities are transformed into more powerful agents of their own destiny. The attention of this anthology is on transformative learning in ACE, no matter what form it takes.

Second filter: Social capital

Hanifan first documented the term 'social capital' in 1920,[1] making specific links between community development and community education. Yet in the 1990s it seems as though social capital was independently discovered by disciplines ranging from economics[2] to sociology[3]. Suddenly its time has come. And the arrival of social capital as an idea *is* sudden and explosive. Search engines on the Internet increased their search numbers for social capital from around 24 in 1997 to thousands in the year 2000.

The more effective our communication, the more social capital we create. Social capital is the cement of society's goodwill—it connects us with one another to create a cohesive society. When we interact with other people -and with all of the products people make - we use social capital to activate our human values, skills, expertise and knowledge. Social capital provides the social infrastructure support for our lives as we move about in a web of elastic networks connecting home, work, learning, leisure and public life. Social capital gives meaning to the visible picture we present to the world. We use social capital to tell the world who we are and what we are like, to build up and express our public identities. That is to say, the interactions that create social capital, are the same interactions that give our lives their distinctive socio-cultural shape.

ACE and social capital have strong synergies. In ACE, these synergies are generated locally and highlighted by national policy documents. Campbell and Curtin (1999)[4] note that, 'One of the hallmarks of the [ACE] sector is its ability to respond to local needs, creating diversity in both the programs offered and their mode of delivery'. At the other end of the scale, the Senate's 1997 'Beyond Cinderella'[5]argued for 'unequivocal commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and the creation of a learning society' through ACE.

Social capital terms explained

Social capital

Social capital is the sum of the social values (norms) networks and trust[6] that facilitate a group's purposeful action. Michael Woolcock[7] describes social capital as "encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit". Portes[8] observes that, "[w]hereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships".

Shared values and norms

Shared values (such as attitudes to gender and beliefs about how children should be brought up) and shared social norms (such as speech, dress and manner codes) are at the core of what makes us the same, and at the core of what makes different groups of people different. Child rearing practices and the roles of women and men can vary from one social group to another, as do dress manners and speech. These vary even more significantly across cultures.

The values we learn and work with in our close family, neighbourhood and community help shape our 'sense of sharing' and 'belonging' and determine whether we feel wanted and valued by society.

Shared values are the crystals around which networks grow. They can make the difference between good and bad networks. Anti-social, aggressive or embittered values by themselves will lead to unproductive, negative networks and interactions. Shared values based on individual worth and collective endeavour will more likely be productive and lead to wellbeing.

Networks

Networks link people to each other and to their communities and society. Constructive networks will build on the strength of their internal bonding ties, and draw on an array of external knowledge and information resources as well. Such networks have plenty of variety in character and content and are also nourished from sources outside themselves. On the other hand, poor quality networks will promote restricted and inward looking interactions. The resources of knowledge and information they draw on will be limited and interactions will be as narrow as the interpersonal identities that inform them. They seldom link with networks outside those that are well-used and familiar.

Interaction and reciprocity

'Interaction' may take the form of talk and listening (face-to-face or by phone), writing (letters, emails, faxes), and reading (from a textbook or the Internet, novels, newspapers, computer screens). 'Specific

interaction' occurs between one person and another, 'social interaction' is the combined effects of everyone's communication. The term 'interaction' carries the idea of give and take - of reciprocity. Reciprocity leads to 'obligation' and 'mutual benefit'. Repeated experiences of reciprocity and mutual benefit generate trust, and trust determines the extent and quality of impact of individuals on their communities, a point repeatedly made by the voices in this anthology.

Trust

Trust is learned, and becomes a plank in the platform for further learning. It grows in a community according to commonly held values and shared norms and is *the* critical component of social cohesion, giving all positive social interactions their force. Without confidence that other individuals and the wider community are reliable, consistent, fair and true to their word, individual and social interaction break down.

Those who don't trust don't learn, nor do they function effectively in society. Fukuyama's[9] social analysis sees trust as "the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms". Trust emerges in Putnam's[10] work as an important dimension of social capital.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion means the ties within and across groups and communities. Social cohesion welds networks and bonds people through shared interest in what they perceive as the common good. Soaring divorce rates, single parenting, homelessness, poor intergenerational communication, the intensification of work, a decline in volunteerism, absent fathers, and so on are all considered when public debate turns to a perceived loss of social cohesion.

Externality

Externality in social capital refers to the degree that people are 'outward looking'. To be outward looking is to be more responsive to change, and to display more willingness to adapt to new ideas. Lifelong learning, as a term, suggests a capacity to be open to wider horizons, and responsive to new situations and experiences through life. Externality, responsiveness to change and identity are therefore closely related to learning.

Building social capital

To build social capital, people must have access to a variety of intangible resources, which cluster around *knowledge* resources and *identity* resources. Figure 1 helps show the way in which interactions produce and draw on social capital at the same time. It also shows the nature of the resources that the participants draw on as they interact.

Figure 1: *CRLRA model of building and using social capital*

Action or co-operation for benefit of community and/or its members

Identity

Identity resources shape our identities as we learn to adapt to change, or take on new roles and tasks. Elements of identity resources are shown in Figure 1 above. Unless we get an expanding or changing identity from new knowledge gained in education, training and experience, we are unlikely to use that new knowledge in new situations.

Knowledge

Knowledge resources include the more commonly discussed elements of information and skills. They also include knowing the 'who, when, where, why, how and what if' of the situation in hand. Figure 1 shows some more detail about the nature of the knowledge resources drawn on in interactions.

Historicity and futuricity (vision)

All interactions and social activity are set in time. Historicity is the past dimension of time; futuricity, or

our 'vision' of how things might be, is its future. There are aspects of our personal, institutional, environmental, cultural, economic, community and national histories that we draw on in our social capital building. From the past, we draw on memories, stereotypes, information, values and so on. When we interact with people and social products or artifacts, we also think about the impact of our courses of action on our future. For example, we may be discussing fund raising with another parent from the preschool centre. As we decide what to do to raise funds, we simultaneously draw on our memories of what worked in the past ('Let's not do a cake stall again! Remember last time?') and our shared vision of the future ('We have to raise $3000 by May or this centre which is so good for our kids will be lost'). The depth and richness of our historicity and vision, in combination with our willingness to draw on it as required (self confidence, identity) will have a large bearing on the quality of the social capital we enjoy.

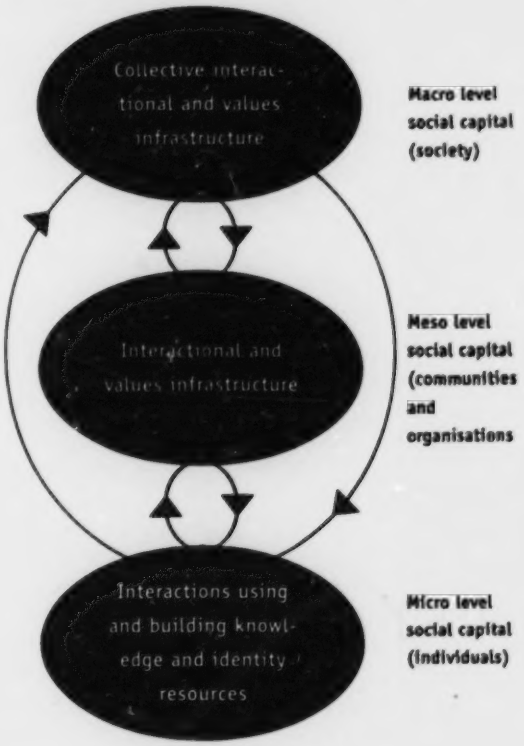
Bonding and bridging ties

Strong social cohesion within one group can be likened to group 'solidarity'. These 'bonding ties' can be detrimental unless balanced by external information and knowledge known as 'bridging ties'[11] . So bonding ties build and maintain cohesion and solidarity in a small group or community. Bridging ties link a smaller group or community's solidarity with external networks of information and knowledge.

How does social capital impact on the socioeconomic wellbeing of society?

In Figure 1.1 we showed how interactions draw on knowledge and identity resources. But this is only one part of the process whereby ACE, through learning, can impact on social capital and wellbeing. If we can show that ACE contributes to social capital, we then need to ask how social capital, in turn, impacts on socioeconomic wellbeing. The model used for showing how social capital can impact on socioeconomic wellbeing is one developed by Falk and Kilpatrick (Figure 2). It illustrates how the impact of social interactions circulates through three tiers of society—micro, meso and macro:

Figure 2: *CRLRA model showing interdependency of levels of social interactivity in building and using social capital*


Collective interactional and values infrastructure
Macro level social capital (society)
Interactional and values infrastructure
Meso level social capital (communities and organisations
Interactions using and building knowledge and identity resources
Micro level social capital (individuals)

The figure illustrates a way to conceptualise the flow of knowledge and identity resources between the three levels - micro, meso and macro. The value of this for ACE lies in the way it shows how even the most seemingly minor interactions between ACE providers and participants can impact on the wider society.

Third filter: Socioeconomic wellbeing

After an exhaustive process spanning the previous decade, the OECD in its report on Social Indicators[13] settled on eight categories of social and economic well being:

1 Health

Many ACE courses and modules deal with health related issues such as Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). Other programs indirectly or incidentally contribute to good health simply through participation.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2 Education and learning

It goes without saying that ACE is a big contributor to education and learning including through its role as a springboard into other forms of education in work places, TAFE institutes and universities. Pathways also lead to greater and more skillful community participation.

3 Employment and quality of working life

In the data for this study, many people talk about the contribution ACE makes to their employment status. About 10% of ACE courses are accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET). On-the-job and in-house VET learning, facilitated by an ACE provider in one of the portraits in this anthology is an example of ACE's ability to enhance careers.

4 Time and leisure

ACE provision is best known for the value it adds to the quality of leisure time and recreational activities. Alternative lifestyle and technology courses abound and a host of personal development courses thrive in the market place. For the cost of a low membership fee older adults attend University of the Third Age (U3A) programs taught by volunteers. The contributions of volunteers to ACE programs are documented through the portraits. Volunteer contributions fall into both *time/leisure* and *employment/quality of working life* categories.

5 Command over goods and services

Command over goods and services, exercised by individuals in ways that benefit those individuals, is an indicator of socioeconomic wellbeing. Many ACE courses are set up with the express purpose of assisting people to be discriminating consumers, to write letters of complaint and enquiry, and to manage their personal lives in difficult circumstances and on tight budgets. Many English as a Second Language and first language adult literacy and numeracy courses fulfil this function amongst broader goals.

6 Physical environment

How does ACE contribute to the environment? Courses that explicitly offer environmental content are one obvious example, but sound training and education in other ACE areas also contribute to this category, as in a 'cooking for one' course for older persons that shows how to re-cycle waste.

7 Social environment

Included in this grouping are explicit qualities of social capital, trust-building, social cohesion, and civic participation in community functions and groups, as well as general feelings of happiness.

8 Personal safety

ACE contributes to personal safety by providing safe learning settings, teaching courses such as self defence for women which enhance physical safety, and fostering emotional and pyschological safety through communal learning experiences which explicitly name a greater capacity to ensure personal safety as an educational outcome. Command over appropriate forms of literacy, numeracy and written and spoken English language are also integral to personal safety at home and in the workplace.

In this study, these eight groupings provide an indicative schema that allows us to look for and map links between ACE learning activity and community wellbeing at a macro level.

The process we use

In March 1999, the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE) in Victoria called for expressions of interest in a research project to develop case studies of people or communities benefiting from participation in ACE. In particular, the research was to explore the extent to which ACE is contributing to community social capital. We proposed the development of theoretically-informed, Instrumental Case Studies to test the contention that learning generally, and ACE specifically, adds value to the community because it:

- generates social capital;
- champions and promotes lifelong learning;
- develops and uses the skills of an extensive network of volunteers;
- fosters citizenship and democratic participation, and
- enhances the social health of individuals and communities.

The project would 'produce an anthology of complementary thematic portraits of learners or volunteers in ACE', to 'test the extent to which the experiences of learners and volunteers in ACE have been transforming for themselves and communities'. The themes outlined above were to 'be reflected and examined in the portraits' and conclusions developed based on a rigorous analysis of the major ways in which ACE might contribute to social capital'.

Each ACFE Regional Council and the peak Indigenous education provider in Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), was invited nominate providers or specific programs that:

- strengthen existing community networks and create new networks;
- develop trust within the community;
- foster the development of common or community goals for the common good;
- produce transformational experiences for learners, teachers or tutors, the community or a group within the community; and
- respond to local needs by impacting on the whole community.

Ten cases were selected, one from each region and one that was specific to the Koorie community. To cover the diversity of ACE activity we selected cases which in their totality, illustrate all of the following themes:

- ACE Curriculum and Transformation
- ACE Delivery and Transformation
- ACE and Community Development
- ACE and Koorie Community Wellbeing
- Collaboration between ACE providers and other organisations
- ACE and Lifelong Learning
- ACE and Senior Citizens
- ACE and Youth
- Volunteers in ACE
- Transformation of ACE

On-site consultations were held with program participants, tutors, and coordinators and, where applicable, business and community group representatives.

This anthology of research narratives sets out the ways ACE transforms people, their communities and the wider society. Each portrait shows how ACE participation impacts on the wider social and economic wellbeing of a community. The impact is gauged against the OECD's 8 indicator bands of social and economic wellbeing. The case studies are followed by a theoretical synthesis of research findings.

About the ten portraits

In the table which follows we summarise the ten cases selected for ease of reference.

In the next ten chapters we present individual portraits of the sites. Then the conclusion brings together data from the 10 portraits in an analysis of ACE's contribution to socioeconomic well being.

Each individual portrait concentrates on the key analytic categories of social capital and socioeconomic wellbeing *for that site*. None does full justice to all that happens there. When the ten portraits are viewed together in all of their richness, depth and diversity, the overall effect is one of real and significant impact of adult and community education on the lives of people, their communities, regions, the entire state of Victoria, and ultimately the nation.

Table 2: *Showing sites, regions, provider, client focus, social capital elements and OECD indicator bands*

	ACFE Region	Provider	Social group focus	Social capital focus	Wellbeing dimension/s
1 Ballarat East	Central Highlands Wimmera	Ballarat East Community House	Unemployed and disabled people	Reciprocity, trust, networks	Health, Social environment, Education & learning
2 Maribyrnong	Central Western Metropolitan	Maribyrnong Community Centre	Horn of Africa women refugees	Networks, trust	Health, Social environment, Command over goods & services, Education & learning
3 Colac	Barwon South Western	Colac ACE	Business & workers	Partnerships, networks	Employment & quality of working life, Education & learning
4 Robinvale	Loddon Campaspe Mallee	Robinvale LAECG	Koorie youth	Norms, trust	Education & learning, Employment, Social environment
5 Bendigo	Loddon Campaspe Mallee	Future Connections	Youth at risk	Networks, trust	Personal safety, Health, Education & learning, Social environment
6 Brunswick	Northern Metropolitan	Aboriginal Community Elders Service	Koorie Elders	Historicity, trust	Health, Social environment, Personal safety, Education & learning
7 Cheltenham	Southern Western Port	Cheltenham Neighbourhood House	Migrants & special groups	Reciprocity, identity, bonding & bridging ties	Employment, Command over goods and services, Physical environment, Education & learning
8 Hawthorn	Eastern Metropolitan	Hawthorn Community Education Centre	Senior citizens	Identity, trust and self confidence	Health, Education & learning, Time & leisure, Personal safety, Command over goods and services
9 Cobram	Goulburn Ovens Murray	Cobram Community House	Rural women	Personal trust, networking	Command over goods and services, Social environment, Education & learning, Employment & quality of working life
10 Morwell	Gippsland	SCOPE	Community leaders	Trust, externality, community networking	All

1 Hanifan, L. 1920, *The Community Center*, Silver Burdette & Co, Boston.

2 E.g., Silverman, H. 1935, *The Substance of Economics*, Pitman, Melbourne.

3 Bourdieu, P. 1983, 'Economic capital, cultural capital, social capital', *Soziale-Welt, Supplement 2*, pp. 183–198.

4 Campbell, A. & Curtin, P. eds 1999, ACE—Some Issues, NCVER, Adelaide, p. 1.

5 *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society, Report to the Senate Education, Employment and Training References Committee*, AGPS, Canberra, p. 15.

6 Putnam, R. 1993, *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

7 Woolcock, M. 1998, 'Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework', *Theory and Society*, vol. 27, pp. 151–208.

8 Portes, A. 1998, 'Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp.1–24, p. 7.

9 Fukuyama, F. 1995, *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*, Free Press, New York, p. 27.

10 op. cit.

11 Putnam, R. 1999, *Social Capital: Bowling alone, the book*, Keynote speech to World Bank Social Capital Conference, Washington DC, June.

12 Falk, I. & Kilpatrick, S. 2000, 'What is social capital? A study of rural communities', *Sociologia Ruralisi*,vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 87–110.

13 OECD, 1982, *International List of Social Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

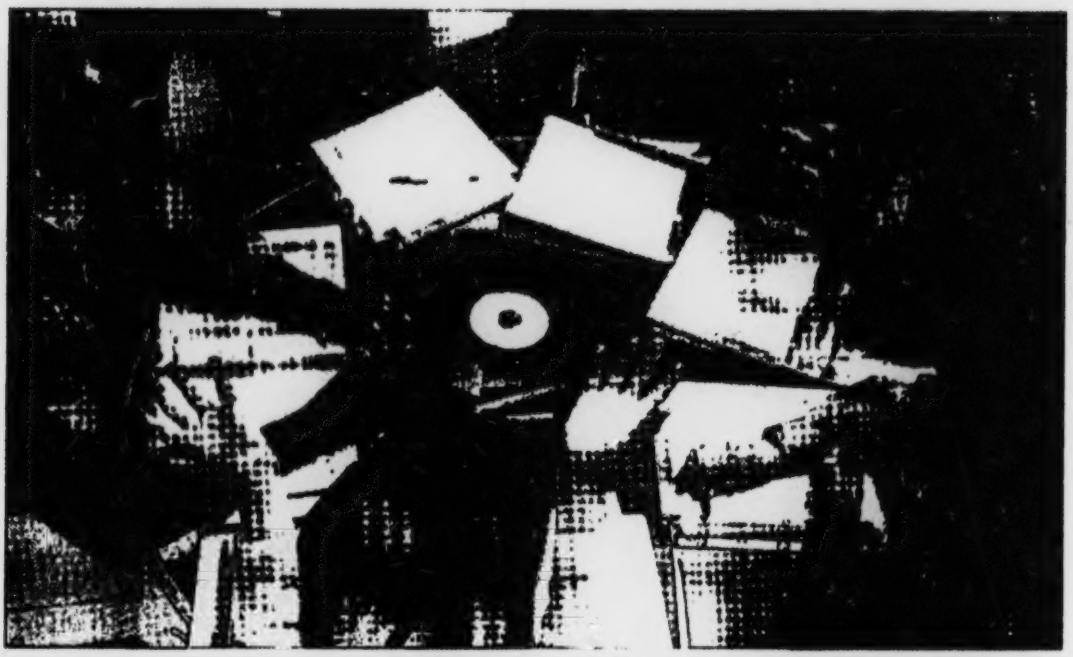
14 Stake, R. 1995, *The Art of Case Study Research*, Sage, CA, p. 3.

15 Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2000, *Adult and Community Education's impact on social capital and lifelong learning*, ACFE Board, Melbourne.

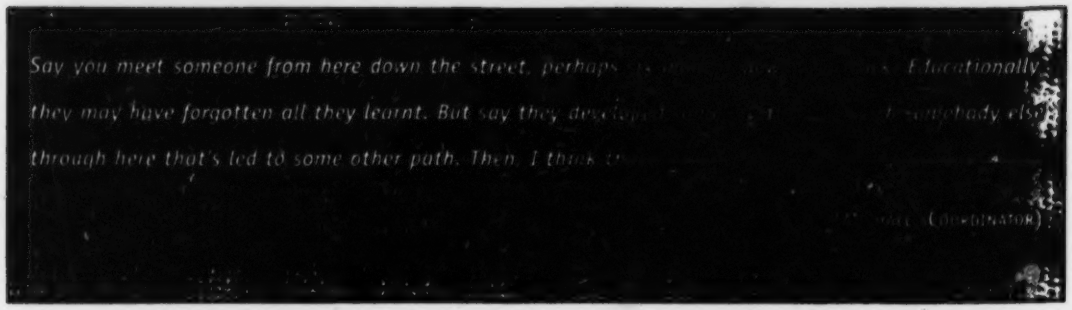
ONE

A learning community builds social capital:

Ballarat East Community House



Ballarat East Community House is a learning community where students, many of whom are educationally disadvantaged, experience new people and ideas in the security that comes with knowing they belong to a close community. In the introduction we defined learning as interactions between people, or between people and their environment, that lead to new ways of thinking, knowing and doing. By 'learning community' we mean a community where interactions of this type are the norm and not the exception. This portrait shows how a learning community builds social capital. Ballarat East Community House is a community resource comprising relationships (both external and internal to the community), norms, and values.


Say you meet someone from here down the street, perhaps
Educationally
they may have forgotten all they learnt. But say they
somebody else
through here that's led to some other path. Then I think

Welcome to the House

Ballarat East Community House (BECH) is just outside the edge of the central city shopping zone: a weatherboard house like many others on the older and poorer side of Ballarat. The House is part of the community landscape for those who know and use it, but the building and the organisation are otherwise very much understated. People who go through the doors describe it in two words—small and friendly.

The House mission statement proposes the best of all learning environments—personal, supportive, challenging and available to all. As part of its mission the House aims to provide '...a community-managed service in a friendly and comfortable environment, accessible to all' and to 'encourage everyone to make full use of their potential'.

A recent self-evaluation by users found that it met those aims. As well as being small and friendly, they said the House is 'a caring environment'. This portrait explores this 'caring environment'. Taking the saying 'it's the people who make a place' as our starting point we ask: Who *is* the House? What happens there? What makes it a good place for learning? What is its contribution to Ballarat?

For everyone who uses it, Ballarat East Community House is a place to meet and a place to learn. Some even call it a second home. Its contribution to Ballarat lies in its capacity to create a productive learning environment for people who in the main have found other education environments hostile to learning. Some go on to bigger educational institutions after the House; some come and go; others stay on and move on within the House.

Ballarat East Community House creates a learning community because of the norms and values upheld; the interactions within its walls; and relationships formed. In other words, good learning happens because students draw on social capital resources within the House, resources to which they contribute. This portrait examines how the House builds the social capital essential to learning.

Who is the House?

The short answer is 'its users'— students, staff, and management committee. In some cases, these categories overlap; students can be volunteer workers, committee members or both. Margaret is now all three—student, cleaner and management committee member. She first came to the House ten years ago to do a typing course and realised she had to improve her literacy and numeracy:

I found that my job [at the time] interrupted the hours I could do study. But I still kept coming back and forth. In the last four years I have stayed in maths and reading and writing. While here I've become involved in some voluntary work. I also asked to go on the committee, mainly as part of my reading and writing program. I felt it would help me learn about what takes place on the committee.

The long answer is more complex and has its roots in the social and economic changes affecting Ballarat. The staff say some big challenges and changes have decided who will come and what programs they will do. They are high unemployment, disenchantment with and failure at school, increasing education requirements in workplaces, government incentives to choose foundation education for educationally disadvantaged adults and more personal requests from community members.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The House began in 1982 and Michael, the third coordinator, has been in this position for 13 years. He jokes that the House is 'almost a life sentence...a bit of a life project' and explains that the House was set up out of a need for a creche and at the start most users were women with young children.

As the programs changed so did the people who came to the House. Anna has many years of experience teaching at the House and at the local TAFE and says:
I don't think it's specific to the Ballarat East residential area at all. There's, you know, the feeders into programs here from all over Ballarat and beyond, and I think they just target the programs that are run.

Both Michael and Anna say that ten years ago mainly young mothers who wanted refresher courses to prepare themselves for further courses came to the House, as well as a lot of retired people interested in craft or working as volunteers. Anna also recalls 'our usual bundle of long-term unemployed people, but the 25 to 30 year olds would be just about the lowest age of students you'd have here'.

Now the age group, education levels, and the expectations of students have all changed. In terms of staffing, volunteers have dwindled.

Michael estimates that 30 to 40% of current students have a Year 7–8 education. He notes significant increases in those with at least a Year 12 education; younger people especially very early school leavers; and in people who have tried other education options without success. Some are socially isolated for any number of reasons including poverty, while others got to the end of work preparation programs to find no fulfilling work or no work at all:
We often get them at the end of possible pathways. That's particularly true for the course that prepares people with disabilities for work. There's quite a few people go through that.... There's a couple of options for them but they are fairly underpaid, and they're better off not working and doing something like this.

Tim is 21 years old and uses a wheel chair. His experience of school was negative and says this was at least partly due to his own aggressive and anti-social behaviour. He has a job but came to the House to take an Internet computer class in the hope of getting a better one:
I feel there aren't many jobs for disabled, that is, people in wheelchairs. And it's been hard for me. I've got a job at the moment and that's cutting cloth and it gets pretty boring. This here is just another outlet for me—another thing that I can do—and I love it.

Tim's purpose is typical of a recent trend. Michael reflects that in the eighties, many people did courses 'to learn for learning's sake'. Now expectations are market driven:
Over the last three or four years I reckon I've really noticed that people are much more tough on you in terms of: What do you offer? What's in it for me? What am I going to get out of this? Am I going to get a bit of paper at the end of it? I think the mood of people has changed. It's almost in terms of arming yourself for survival I suppose: arming yourself with assets for survival.

What happens in the House?

Much of the activity in the House is clustered around programs. The brochure advertising its 1999 Spring programs is packed with 35 options covering: computers and information technology; literacy; weekly general courses including first aid, cooking, craft, massage; short courses such as aromatherapy, self-publishing; and consumer education workshops. Literacy and information technology have outstripped the others in recent years.

The House has a strong and growing commitment to incorporating computer access and on-line learning in its programs. Michael explains that the impetus for this came several years ago:
There was a project here about four years ago where the local ACFE chairperson was pretty 'switched on' and decided that the Internet was somewhere where adult education was going to go...They were setting up providers from here to the border with the Internet connection and going up and training them. So that gave me an 'in' to the skills I suppose, and then I started to work with the students here, publishing on the Web and using email...

Programs are only a part of what happens. The brochure invites participation in the running of the House with the words: 'You are very important to us. WE WELCOME YOUR INVOLVEMENT'. Margaret helps in classes as well as being a committee member:
Earlier this year I decided to join the cooking class as though I was a student. I really came just to assist the

cook, to help her, but I also learnt a lot, through the cooking as well. But it was just to be there as support for her with the students.

What makes the House a community?

Positive interactions, good relationships, and a sense of belonging contribute to feeling and being part of a community. Partly through circumstance, but more so by design, the House has these attributes.

The smallness of the house and the large amounts of time people spend there help foster community. Anna suggests that:
...it becomes a community because a lot of the people come here to multiple courses and for more than one day, and they, of course, network and get to know each other.

Michael agrees that 'there's a bit of a sense that everybody has a sense of who's who' and teachers integrate students from different courses to maximise the community building value of the smallness of the house and the classes. The value of building relationships and developing networks is recognised as critical to personal growth and social development. To explain the priority on setting up situations for interactions, Michael looks down the hallway at a group cooking a meal in the kitchen as part of a program and says:
Most of them are probably isolated people in their sort of home situation ... The cooking for that particular group is pretty much just a justification to get people together. I've often thought...say you meet someone from here down the street, perhaps six months down the track. Educationally, they may have forgotten all they learnt. But say they developed some relationship with somebody else through here that's led to some other path. Then, I think that's successful.

Tim, the student who came to the House for computer skills, confirms the value of the relationships he has developed at the House. For him, they produce clear health benefits:
It's great here. It gets rid of a lot of stress and pain that I have and I mean, sometimes I get here and I'm very down and ready to do something stupid. But I mean I've got a close friend here and I have a talk to her if she's here. Yeah we have a bit of a talk. And I also have a talk to Michael or Anna because I'm good friends with them, and also they are my tutors and I feel I could tell them anything and it's kept confidential.

The norms and values that make the House a community are also those that create the caring environment that fosters learning for people who may have been unable to learn effectively elsewhere. But there is an additional factor, deliberately attended to, that makes all the difference between a community and a learning community. That factor is its relationship to the outside world.

Why is the House a learning community?

Not all communities are learning communities. In the introduction we identified different kinds of learning such as lifelong learning, transformational learning, and skills learning. Learning we said, consists of those interactions between people or between people and things in their environment that result in new ways of thinking, knowing and doing. For a community to be a learning community these kinds of interactions need to be the norm.

The House has many elements necessary for learning interactions to occur. Margaret calls on her own experience and that of others she has seen over the years to identify something of what this means:
They find it homely and very relaxed, compared to being in a big classroom with a lot of students all sitting one-way in the class. Down here I feel this introduces them to the learning first and that is a big help for when they go onto places like TAFE or school. I've noticed this happen with students when they've gone on from here. This gives them a start in a more relaxed atmosphere first.

One factor critical to the quality of learning interactions is the relationship that the community has with the 'outside world'. The more a community is closed to outside influences and stimuli, the less its members learn. In the language of social capital, the extent and the ways in which a community interacts with the outside world is referred to as its dimension of externality.

Communities like the House risk being closed communities when people do not move on to work or to other learning venues. For some, this is a very difficult if not an impossible option because of their past unsuccessful experiences with workplaces, schools or TAFE. Anna elaborates:
For some, this community house is the only place where somebody seems to really care about them and it's the only place they can regularly come once a week and know that there is a spot for them. You know, they

belong. Here at the community house there's probably more of a 'community atmosphere' which most of these kids don't get anywhere else.

The Ballarat East Community House manages the risk of becoming a closed community principally through the educational programs it offers. To cater for students who are not yet ready or do not wish to establish their own links to other communities, people and ideas, the strategy of the staff is to bring the ideas and people to the House.

For a start, the programs generate enough turnover of students to ensure that any norms of the core group that may potentially inhibit learning are challenged. In fact, one of the attractions of the House for Margaret is the new people she meets:
I enjoy the company, meeting all walks of life, which opens up a lot of avenues in conversation about the different fields that people are in. That adds to your learning because you can do it through conversing. I enjoy seeing the people come and go, seeing what they get out of here.

New technologies give tremendous capacity to develop the dimension of externality. The Internet is used as a communication tool to develop links with other students locally and internationally. Michael believes that technology helps students develop 'that sense of being able to communicate outside their community and their location' and facilitates 'interacting in the worlds of other people, unhampered'.

The literacy program in particular is stimulated by technology. More than other programs, the literacy program has students who are slow to move on to other pathways. Those who do film-making and publishing on the Web at the end of their projects are 'getting in a pathway' and moving on without having to move out.

Michael argues that unlike classroom exercises where the tutor and other class members are the audience, films and Web pages are aimed at an 'authentic' audience in the real world. These creations, watched or read by audiences far beyond the House, demonstrate that the makers have ideas and skills worth sharing. These products are an affirmation of the value of the participants' work and have a self-esteem building potential.

The House uses the Web to make contact with virtual learning communities spanning the globe. Michael describes one such initiative:

'MOO' is an educational non-profit group that's based in New York and it uses a tele-netted software that allows you to communicate with other people and build objects. You build rooms. So tomorrow we're going to start that project. We're going to meet with some Taiwanese students. And students are coming in one Wednesday night to meet some Ukrainians. Then we're all going to be part of a project co-ordinated by a university lecturer in Japan who will divide all the students up around the world that are part of this project into small teams to work on language skills.

Learning Narratives

Learning communities are made up of learners and undoubtedly all the participants in this House have unique stories of their learning journeys. Margaret and Tim are two very different learners, but both are members of the same learning community. Here they reflect on their learning at the Ballarat East Community House. Both stories describe powerful experiences that have transformed how Margaret and Tim see themselves and how they interact with the world.

Tim's story

Tim came to learn computer skills but along the way, he has learnt, sometimes painfully, new values and norms that make his interactions with others more productive:
I've had to learn a lot over the years ... I was a snotty-nosed, spoilt little mongrel putting it mildly, and I hated everybody. But I've had to adapt. I had a massive chip on my shoulder as a result of my disability and my way of upbringing and everything. And I just thought: I hate all you guys. I hate this. I hate that. I don't want to do it!

But then I came here and I realised: Well, I can't be like that because if I am, I'm going to get into trouble and it's going to put me down.

When I first started I was scared and that. I didn't know how to take the people. There's a lot of people that come here and you don't know how to take them first off. I mean that's the same with anything. I mean you've just got to grit your teeth. I've got to know them now and I have a great time.

Yeah, it's made me a better person. I mean there's other things in my life that have turned me around, but this has also been a big part of it as well...

Margaret's story

Margaret's passion to learn brought her recognition when she featured in an 'Adult Learners Week' article in the *Melbourne Age* in 1998.[1] Margaret's learning at the House is as much about her value to the community in her multiple roles of committee member, volunteer and student as it is about new skills and knowledge:

...I find I have learnt a lot, over the last few years. When I was younger, because of my lack of knowledge with reading and writing, because of not being at school since 13, I was not able to participate on committees. I didn't know then what they were on about so I did not join in on mother's club meetings due to the inferionties I had about it. And I couldn't understand what they were talking about....

The last two terms I decided not to be a student. But I would come down at quarter to twelve and have lunch with the cooking class, so I still paid my little fee. That way I had lunch and I kept up with the students said hello to them and sort of had like a family atmosphere really. Yeah, and I like the company as well.

I'm enjoying what I'm seeing and what I'm learning and the beauty of it is that it is at my own pace, even if I have been here for a few years. But that has also helped me to enjoy reading the papers to a degree. I don't get into the heavy government stuff. I'll flash over a bit of that, pick up a bit here and there. And I like reading magazines on health and care more so than stories.

For Margaret, it's a second home, a workplace and a place of learning. For Tim, it's a learning community that will help him reach his goal:

I'd like to become a disabled social worker for the disabled—I have met many of them over my years. I want to be one that's in a wheel chair that handles people that have wheel chairs or that can walk but need a wheel chair, and just to help them get along in life.

To conclude

At the opening of the Ballarat East Community House in 1982 the Hon Pauline Toner, the State Minister for Community Welfare Services[2] said:

I regard Neighbourhood and Community Houses as absolutely vital to the health, growth and development of communities...(to) give people a chance to find their own solutions to personal and family problems in an informal, familiar and supportive setting. At their best they are empowering and enabling agencies...The key objectives are for family support and strengthening and for community organisation and social development.

What the Minister did not say was *how* Houses were to achieve these purposes so vital for community wellbeing. This chapter has been about the *how*—the processes, norms, and values operating in the Ballarat East Community House that produce outcomes named by the Minister and in its own Mission Statement. The *how* is encapsulated in one sentence: *The House strives to be a learning community.*

While the notion of community is intrinsic to all of the ACE organisations portrayed in this collection, each organisation has its own way of expressing community. Common to all is the idea that communities are sub-communities of wider communities. The influence of ACE flows into the multiple communities to which participants belong.

In this chapter we restricted the idea of community to the self-identified community of Ballarat East Community House and stayed inside its doors. Our justification is simple: the House is one community within the community-of-communities called Ballarat. We have shown how this ACE provider works at developing the social capital essential to good learning. We have seen why, for many of its users, the House is a community and a learning community at that. By showing the positive contribution of Adult and Community Education to this sub-community of Ballarat we provide proof enough of its contribution to Ballarat. In subsequent portraits, community is used more broadly.

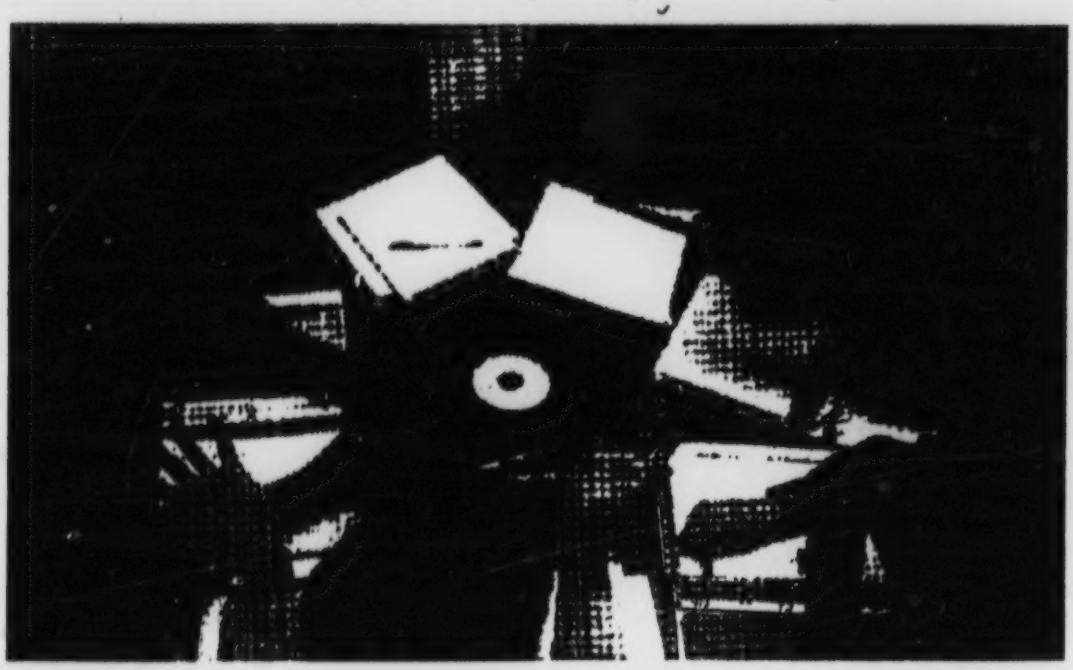
We wanted to start this anthology with an exploration of the smallest community in the collection—a group of people associated with a house. To misquote a proverb, this portrait shows the wisdom of living by the maxim: *Community begins at home—in this case, a house.*

1 http://www.yarranet.net.au/cedric/balleast/pearl.htm.
2 Pauline Toner,. 25 November 1982.

TWO

Make connections and move on:

African Women's Project Maribyrnong Community Centre



A group of refugee and the Maribyrnong Community Centre collaborated to start The African Women's Project with an English as a Second Language course. The project kept going and shows how Maribyrnong Community Centre uses community development processes to manage learning programs. They enter into collaborative decision making with community representatives and participants; set up pathways for students; and maintain relationships with the wider community. Refugee women, many of who are survivors of torture, re-learnt trust in the people and systems of their new country, rebuilt their own cultural community, and began to invest their talents in Victoria. Learning English was just the beginning.

'I can't feel your pain,' I said, 'I can feel it in my own way but you feel it differently. It's deep inside. What happened, happened. But does it help us to reflect that here? I would love you to be my sister, my own flesh and blood.' And she said, 'I don't have any problems. Okay.' And step by step, step by step, we became friends. We are a family now.

(Narrative of Healing: African Women's Project)

Introduction

Over the last five years to the year 1998–1999, almost 55 000 people have resettled in Australia under the Humanitarian Program.[1] Of these, over 18 300 have been refugees. Since 1991, Africa has been one of the priority areas from which refugees and those in humanitarian need have been accepted. Many refugees from the countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti, together called the Horn of Africa, have been resettled in the Western Metropolitan region of Melbourne[2]. Some, who were once in warring countries, are now neighbours in the same block of settlement flats.

The African Women's Project is the project of refugee women from the Horn of Africa and of the Maribyrnong Community Centre, a community based provider of ACE. From its Web page[3], I learn that it is a program that uses story telling to teach English, and that in 1998 it won the AAACE Outstanding Program Award. I also learn it is about women from countries that had been at war for thirty years deciding to build trust and friendships. And that it's also about healing and much more.

Refugees are displaced and dispossessed people. Their story is of loss and trauma. Families and the other social units that shaped their identity and purpose are fractured or destroyed. Many refugees from war-torn countries live a precarious existence in refugee camps for several years before resettling in Australia. Torture is a common experience. According to research cited in Bereded-Samuel,[4] more than 70% of refugees have suffered some form of torture. It is no surprise that loss of trust is one of the most important factors that inhibits the survivors of torture from integrating into the community.[5] Without trust there is no social capital and hence no community. This program was fundamentally about relearning to trust people and systems and about building community.

In three days I try to begin understanding the story of transformation behind the Web page of the African Women's Project. To do this I meet with the people who have been directly involved—the staff, Maryanne Hucker, Elizabeth McGarry and Maggie McGuiness; the community liaison workers and interpreters, Amina Maleken and Elleni Bereded-Samuel; and of course, some of the women whose identities we agree not to reveal.

Wednesday

I begin with Maryanne Hucker now the coordinator of three community centres in Maribyrnong City. At the time the African Women's Project began, she was program coordinator. Maryanne tells me that everyone who was involved in the African Women's Project has moved on. She also adds that they have all kept in close contact. By the end of the three days, I realise that the African Women's Project has had as much to do with making the connections in the first place, as it has had with people 'moving on'—both literally and metaphorically.

Maryanne gives me an overview of the project. It became an African Women's Project when in 1997 the African Community Council responded to an invitation by the Maribyrnong Community Centre to participate in a funded English as a Second Language Program. It was proposed that the medium be story telling. The response drew 27 women, young and old, with education levels varying from university qualifications to women with no formal education whatsoever. Some women had never learnt to read and write and almost none spoke English.

In the first year the participants agreed to document, in English, cultural stories surrounding childhood, adolescence and marriage. Teachers, with the help of interpreters, recorded the stories. Much of the work went on at the Centre but work was also done in the women's homes. At the end of the year, a booklet called 'Stories by Women from the Horn of Africa' was produced and officially launched. Hundreds of copies were distributed to schools, community centres, TAFE Institutes, universities, neighbourhood houses and community agencies. Some of the stories were put on the World Wide Web.

In the second year, the women who stayed in the project decided to document some of their war related stories. These women were mainly Eritrean. To date, these stories full of pain remain in a manila folder waiting to be published. In this, the third year, the formal story telling has been suspended and a group of the women are continuing with language classes.

Maryanne's involvement had been mainly in a background community development role. She liaised with relevant organisations and set up additional support that the women needed for other human services providers such as trauma counsellors.

She explains that the approach to this project has been very much that of community development. This means two things. First, a project is seen as a collaborative venture with the participants. 'What we do,' she says, 'is that we hand over the project. And we say: "Now we work on this together. You have to drive it. You have to tell us what you need and then we can go about getting that in place"'.

Second, it means that once a program finishes, other options are offered to the participants. In reality, the African Women's Project comprised a number of consecutive programs. Maryanne explains, 'You don't set up a project for six weeks and at the end of it say "That's it. That's the six weeks. Thank you very much and goodbye." You offer pathways which mean people are empowered to make a decision for themselves to go on to do something else'.

Maryanne also stresses that calling on existing networks and developing new ones is integral to a community development approach. That is the only way that the diverse needs of a group can be met. She tells me that the project could not have started or continued without networks. For example, the African Community Council was critical in informing the women about the project at the start and later, in funding transport arrangements. Other community centres were also 'called in'. Because the Maribyrnong Community Centre had no computer facilities, for example, the women were bussed to the Yarraville Community Centre. When some of the stories were put on the Web, a volunteer trainer from the Duke Street Neighbourhood House obliged. The examples are many.

Maryanne gives me a copy of the booklet and shows me many beautiful photos that record the special events that were part of the African Women's Project. There was the launch of the booklet, which attracted over 200 people. There were African Nights. The women even set up a stall at the International Women's Day celebrations at Altona Beach. Memories of many special moments flood back. One 'magic' incident, Maryanne remembers, happened at the African Women's Day of Celebration: *We had one room in the Community Centre set up. And we had some African drummers there and music and dance. At the same time there was a ballroom dancing group in the main hall with the ballroom music on. And we're down in the craft room with the African music and the women are showing us how to dance. And you dance mainly with your shoulders. And so there we were doing this when about half a dozen people from the ballroom dancing group came in and said, 'Can we join in? It's much more interesting in here!' So the celebration was gate crashed and it was great. And later, some of the African women went into the ballroom dancing class and had a look around.*

Our conversation stops because Elizabeth McGarry and Amina Maleken arrive to talk with me. Elizabeth is now a social worker but she was a student when involved in the project and helped edit the stories. Amina is the African Community Liaison Worker and works for a Migrant Resource Centre. In the project, she was one of the interpreters and community liaison workers.

I ask Elizabeth how she remembers her involvement in the project. She recollects the meticulous checking that had to be done to ensure that the women were happy with their stories. At least three full checks were made for each story with the interpreters working to and fro between her and the women. She also remembers how the women's confidence grew when they heard their stories read back to them. They would suggest corrections or even make complete changes. For Elizabeth, the project proved how learning opportunities can be creative and 'not be confined within a structure'.

Amina's association with the project has been that of both helper and participant. She is Eritrean and knows first hand the experiences of these women. I ask Amina why it was women's only project. 'Because,' she says, 'women have very important things to say and they need to have a place to make their stories public.'

Amina goes on to explain that men have many forums in which to tell their stories but women, especially women from cultures that are male dominated, have almost no opportunities to have their voice heard. 'And why has this project been so special?' I ask. 'Because it brought the women together', she says.

Before the project, there was strong distrust between the two major groups, the Ethiopians and the Eritreans, a legacy of their countries' warring histories. In fact, there was no contact between the women at all. Even the children did not speak to one another. The project brought them together and they had to talk. They all wanted to document stories but they had to decide which stories should be told. Some wanted war stories, others did not. This took many weeks of discussion and arguing before a decision was made. But the process brought the group together and Amina has seen many benefits flow from this. She doesn't elaborate. She says I can ask the women themselves when I meet them later in the week.

Thursday

Today I meet Elleni Bereded-Samuel, the other community worker and interpreter. She worked with the Ethiopian women. Elleni was formally involved with the project for only the first 12 months and Maryanne gives me the background information that explains this.

After a few months in the project, many of the younger women had become confident enough to talk about looking for other education or training opportunities. Their formal education had been interrupted in their country and here, they didn't know where to go or what was available. They also realised that their English still needed a lot of work. So Maryanne invited the Victoria University of Technology (VUT) to talk to them about some options. That was the beginning of a chain of events that led to the younger women in the project moving on to VUT and to Elleni going with them.

When Elleni arrives, she and Maryanne greet each other warmly. She apologises profusely for not having succeeded in bringing some of the younger women but they are too busy. End-of-year exams are looming and they are studying.

Elleni tells me her story. In Ethiopia, she had been university-trained as a teacher, but in Australia, she had been unable to get satisfactory work. The African Women's Project changed that and now she is the Community Partnerships Liaison Officer for the VUT. The transition she believes, began when VUT saw what was happening in the African Women's Project. There is no doubt in Elleni's mind why the African Women's Project has worked.

Why I say they [the facilitators] are great is because they don't assume that this community is like this or like that. They don't stereotype. They have respect for the community. And in whatever they do, they are very sensitive, culturally sensitive. And they always consult with us at each and every step.

As a result of its contact with the project, VUT set up a bridging course for the young women. Initially, Elleni worked in a volunteer capacity as a cultural support officer and interpreter. After gaining the necessary qualifications, she became a trainer. That course was followed by others and many of the young women are now following pathways that are leading to university studies or jobs.

But as well as the courses, VUT established an African Communities Advisory Committee to identify education, training and employment needs and where necessary, to develop appropriate courses. Because the models used have been successful, the concept has since been extended to a University Community Partnership Advisory Committee that is much broader in scope. As Community Partnerships Liaison Officer, Elleni's work now involves helping other ethnic communities access education and training opportunities. In this capacity she has worked with the Indian, Albanian and Kurdish communities.

From Elleni's perspective, the African Women's Project not only contributed to the transformation of her life but also to the transformation of education and work opportunities for many people across many ethnic groups in Melbourne's Western region.

Thursday evening

Thursday evening I meet Maggie McGuiness, the tutor

for the program. She has not worked at the Maribyrnong Centre for over 18 months but Maryanne has asked her if we could meet to talk about the project. She had been with the project right from the beginning and up to the completion of the war stories. She picks me up at the hotel for a meal and we talk for the next four hours. Maggie has recently returned from a Churchill Fellowship overseas and now works in another part of the city. As we talk, I notice that the word 'connection' peppers her conversation.

Maggie is a community worker. She describes herself as a story maker who helps women heal themselves through story telling. I ask Maggie what her role in the project was and I'm told that the word 'role' grates. I rephrase the question. 'Who were you in that group?' I ask. She replies:

I was one of the women. Very much one of the women. I hadn't been through what they'd been through in the war but I'd been through the other things. Growing up, puberty, marriage, childbirth, through pain and sorrow, celebration, sadness. So that's where our connection was. It just happened that I was a member of the dominant culture who could actually help them get their stories out.

We discuss how relationships and connections developed in the group. Maggie talks of trust, the slow but solid building up of trust. She remembers the care taken to ensure that the story-tellers retained absolute control over their stories right through to the published product. But trust also developed through open sharing and exchange of culture and viewpoints. This included the tutors as much as the participants. Maggie suddenly breaks into laughter and tells a story:

The women were having a lengthy discussion. Then Amina turns to us and says, 'They're willing to share these things with you but they want you to first show us your songs and dances and games'. And so Maryanne and I look at one another and go 'Okay...'. So we did 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Rosy'. And so there's these two large women running around this room doing 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Rosy'. So they laughed uproariously. They thought it was hysterical. And then we did a 'Drop-the-Hanky'. And it turns out they've got similar games. And it really took off from there.

The connection was made but the exchange went more deeply than that. Personal narratives were shared, difference of opinion and custom respected. For the Horn of African women, Maggie feels that the white Australian born tutors may have been the windows into a culture that was foreign. It was also a culture that in some ways even threatened to absorb their children and grandchildren. Maggie recreates for me how these exchanges would go:

Of course when you sit and talk to women you don't just go 'Oh yeah...mmm...is that so?' You tell them your own story at the same time. I mean they used to ask me questions like...'How many children do you have?' 'One'. 'Oh, only one?' 'And it's a girl'. 'That's terrible!' And by this time, they are able to laugh and say 'Oh that's terrible' knowing that in my culture it wasn't terrible. 'And you have a husband?' 'No.' 'Are you divorced?' 'Yes.' 'Do you have a boyfriend?' 'Yes, I do.' 'Oh, that's terrible too. In our country you would be classed as this, this and this. We understand in your country it's different. But we don't want our granddaughters to be like you'.

Maggie is quick to point out that the Africa women were also her windows into a different way of being and seeing. She remembers their generosity and their invitations to weddings and African Night celebrations and how she was taken in as part of the family.

As Maggie drives me back to where I'm staying she continues to reminisce about the African Women's Project. She describes the experience as 'amazing and just too valuable to ever have done without'.

Friday

Finally, I am meeting some of the Horn of Africa women who were part of the original 1997 group. I know that they will be the older ones, the grandmothers and great grandmothers. In their own countries some may never have written or read a single word but may speak up to six languages. Amina is also coming to interpret. I am nervous, afraid that I might appear rude or intrusive.

Soon four women arrive dressed in traditional robes and scarves. They walk slowly into the room and greet me with a smile and a soft English, 'Hello'. Amina is with them. We sit around a table in the very room where it all began three years ago. They will soon be showing me where the Ethiopian women used to sit and where the Eritrean women sat. This was before the African Women's Project blurred their differences. But for now, I look into their faces as they into mine. I see that I cannot possibly begin to understand their life stories of pain and loss.

Amina explains the research project and the Interviewee Consent Form that they need to sign. This is their first

encounter with the world of research and they're not comfortable. They want me to read out loud each of the 14 points. Amina is to provide explanation after each point. Translation requires much clarification and it becomes a lengthy process. At the end, they slowly and carefully sign their names. We then begin.

'Why did you become part of the project?' I ask. They take turns to answer. All of them talk of the need to learn English to better integrate into Australian society. They also talk of the need to record their stories of tradition and culture so that Australians will know about them and so better understand the people from the Horn of Africa. The stories are also something precious that they can leave their children.

'And what happened in the African Women's Project?' I then ask. Three big things happened they tell me. First, the project brought the women together and those relationships have continued. Where previously there had been no social contact between the women of Eritrea and those of Ethiopia, now they visit each other, support each other, attend each other's weddings and have other celebrations together. Second, their stories have been told and documented as was the plan. There are even photographs and a video that go with the stories. Third, they have learnt more English.

Learning English continues to be very important to these women. 'We have to learn English for our lives', Amina translates.

They regularly come to the Maribyrnong Centre to attend classes. In the last three months, they have had the confidence to join classes that include people of other nationalities. Until now, they had been comfortable only with other Horn of Africans and would have refused to go to mixed classes. They explain that it takes time for them to learn but they are making progress. Those with children or grandchildren at school feel they need to learn English to strengthen their connections with their own flesh and blood. They fear the young are slipping away from them. Mastering the language has also meant having more control over their lives. They shop independently; they do their own banking; they manage public transport. Mobility is very important. 'We go everywhere now', they tell me.

One woman tells a story of how her knowledge of English helped her in a misadventure on a train excursion to Dandenong. Her bag had been stolen but she had seen the thief. Her English is halting but the story is too important not to be understood. She role plays. She acts out the drama using different voices for the protagonists. She uses the handbag she has with her as her prop. This is the first time in the interview that English is being spoken at length. The other women know the story and regularly interrupt. It has been told many times and has become part of the collective 'Look what we can do' narrative. She accuses the man and argues the case with his female companion. Both deny it. Eventually a policeman arrives and she explains her predicament. The man is questioned. The handbag is found but her money is missing. But the man hid the money in his jacket! How much was the money? asks the policeman. She tells him. She also tells him the denominations of the notes. Alas for the thief, the evidence is convincing. It takes several months before her money is returned, but it is returned.

I ask her if she trusted the policeman. 'Yes', she replies. 'Of course'.

The story is a good one and we all enjoy it. Our meeting comes to an end and I wish I could speak their language. We say goodbye. It is only now I realise that Amina went to the women's homes to drive them to this interview. I thank her for her effort but she shrugs it off. She has worked with some of these women for almost ten years and it is clear to me that she holds a deep respect for them. We kiss and say goodbye.

My time at Maribyrnong has almost ended. Amazingly, given her workload, Maryanne makes time to talk to me once more before I leave. She sees that the African Women's Project has had a profound impact on me. I'm not alone. The Footscray Community Arts Centre has approached the women to transform their stories into theatre. Schools have contacted the Centre wanting to display the project. And whenever it's been displayed there are follow up phone calls. Workers from other government authorities ask for advice on how to set up similar projects in their ethnic communities. After a recent conference at which the project was presented, people from the Koorie community made contact. They want to share their experiences about a similar project that they're establishing to record Koorie stories and experiences.

The African Women's Project itself is on the eve of a new phase. ACFE funding for the Year 2000 will see the African Women's Project Roadshow visit neighbourhood houses, community centres, and libraries in the region. More of the stories will be put on the Web. Women will

show their book, their photos and video and do readings of their stories. The logistics sound complicated and time consuming. 'Why do it?' I ask. Maryanne doesn't hesitate to reply:

Because it follows on from the original desires of the women. They want to have that information shared, to get the information out there. Particularly in schools. And in other places where the women themselves or their children use the services and facilities. They want people to know what it means to have come from the Horn of Africa. That's part of being united.

As I wait for a taxi to the airport, music drifts from the Centre's dance hall. Through the door, I watch white men and women with silver-grey hair waltz the afternoon away. And I remember Maryanne's story of the connections made through dance between black African born and white Australian born. At the time I thought it had been a lucky coincidence. Now I'm thinking that connections at the Maribyrnong Community Centre do not happen by chance.

Reflection

My time at the Centre is finished. After three days I am overwhelmed by the richness of the African Women's Project. It speaks to issues of refugee resettlement and multiculturalism and to women's issues generally. It is also about adult learning, literacy, the learning of English and even the power of narrative. It is about community development. On the one hand, it is about empowerment and access to goods, services and opportunities. On the other, it is about reinventing personal identity and relearning to trust.

The strongest impression I am left with is that the African Women's Project has been providing a safe and productive space for refugees to develop the building blocks of community—connections and trust. Fundamental to the production of social capital, they do not come naturally to people who have suffered trauma from war.

The Maribyrnong Community Centre's approach to adult learning is helping these women to relearn the basics of building community. Here, the growth of adults is based on creating a highly respectful and trusting environment in which learners retain full control over their learning.

For the participants, the African Women's Project has produced tangible results. For the older women it has proven successful in increasing their confidence and mastery of English. As a result they are managing their lives with increasing independence. For the younger women, some have found employment. In terms of education and learning, it has been the stepping stone for many to study at the Victoria University of Technology. More broadly, it has contributed to building connections between other ethnic communities and education and training opportunities.

Its impact however has been even more profound in its transformation of the social environment in which these women live. Social isolation has reduced dramatically. Increasing confidence has encouraged them to make connections outside their own ethnic communities. Women have built friendships that have bridged different cultures and overcome hostile histories. They have found that redefining themselves as Horn of Africans rather than describing themselves as being from one particular nation or tribe, contributes to creating solidarity and commonality.

Most importantly, the project has achieved its purpose for being, that is, the documentation of the women's stories. This was the common purpose that drew the women together and began their journey of growth. The booklet itself is evidence of the trust that the women had in having their stories recorded by the hands of another.

For the wider Australian community, the benefits of the African Women's Project go well beyond cost savings from reduced demand on social welfare services. There are the economic contributions from labour and the social contributions of community building. Finally, the project itself offers a model that can inform the practice of adult learning programs and community development in other contexts.

Conclusion

Emotion suffuses this portrait and that was my intent. Emotion is inevitable when the subject of a portrait is personal narratives of human connections made. However, I had not anticipated the connection that this research would make with my own personal story. From the first day, I could not help but wonder how a similar project might have transformed the life of my own mother fifty years ago. For her, settling in Australia had meant suppressing her stories.

The African Women's Project confirmed for me that Australia has changed. These Horn of African women maintain a strong and steadfast desire to reach out and make contact with what *they* value—their own culture and their own stories. Their seemingly unquestioning belief that, in fact, this is how it should be, profoundly affected me. In contrast, my mother had been convinced that to hold such a belief was absurd.

I was equally as struck by the women's *capacity* to act on their desire to make connections with the wider community. This capacity is as much due to the good-will of all those involved as to the philosophy and practices that shape the programs of the Maribyrnong Community Centre.

But their capacity is also due to a better understanding by Australia of productive diversity. The African women and their families are recognised as being of value to Australian society. Government agencies have provided funding to resource the project. As importantly, individuals and organisations in the community are responding positively to the advances these women are making to mutually understand and enrich one another's lives. What's more, people are now reciprocating and reaching out to connect with them.

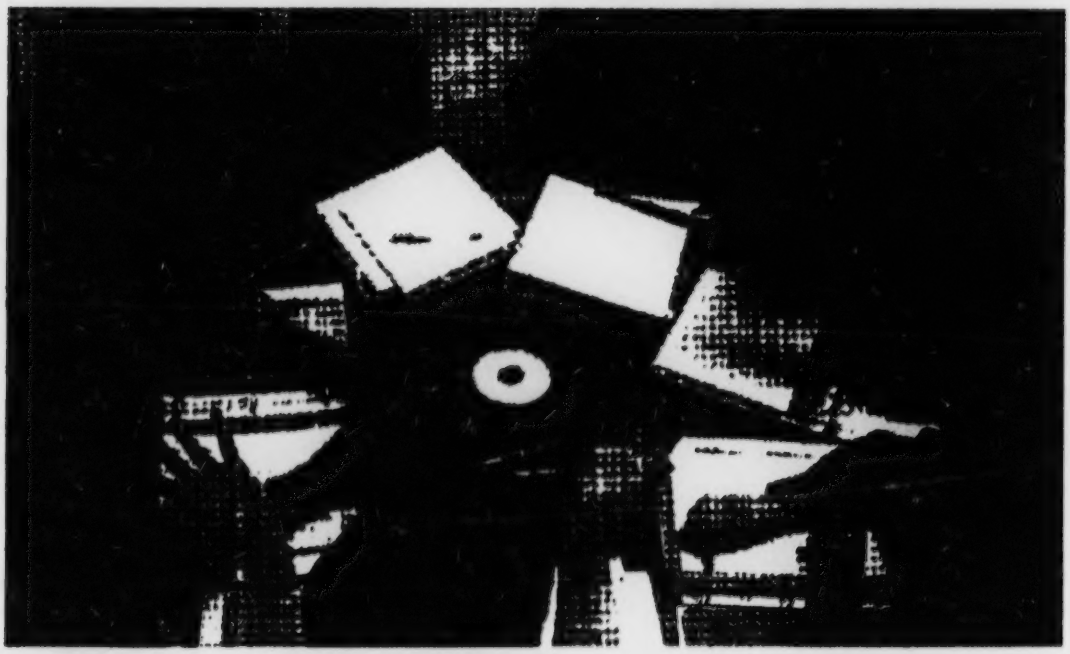
In economic and social terms, it is a model that succeeds in making settlement for migrants as cost-effective and socially beneficial as possible for themselves and the wider community. Fifty years ago, a project such as the African Women's Project would have defied the imagination of the government of Australia and most of its people. The African Women's Project of the Maribyrnong Community Centre is proof that some of us have moved on. This perhaps is the reason it fuels our inspiration and hope for a better society.

1 Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs http://www.immi.gov.au/statistics/refugee.htm
2 See Map 1 in the Appendix.
3 Web page address of the African Women's Project is http://home.vicnet.net.au/~maricomm/project.htm.
4 Bereded-Samuel, E. 1999, *A Profile of Settlers from the Horn of Africa living in the Western Region*. Women's Health West, Footscray.
5 ibid, p. 25.

THREE

Partnership with business builds social capital:

Colac ACE and industry training networks



To develop social capital in rural Victoria Colac ACE has three key strategies. In collaboration with local business it sets up industry training networks delivering quality, cost-effective learning benefits to its members. Second, it works with enterprise management teams to help make workplaces more productive and more satisfying to workers. And third, Colac ACE works with employees and other members of the community to ground personal growth on strong foundations and to develop work-related expertise. Colac ACE understands that regions, communities, individuals and business enterprises, need solid social infrastructure to create a quality training and education culture. The Colac community has networks, trust, and common goals. Colac has abundant social capital.

Survival of your community depends on survival of your [illegible] away from community, and say, well, that's business and this is comp[illegible]nities. The workplace is one of those communities. It's [illegible] a healthy place to be in.

[illegible] (Colac ACE)

For the last ten years Colac Adult and Community Education Incorporated (Colac ACE) has bent itself to the task of transforming workplaces and the people who work in them in their town and district. Colac ACE identified itself as a vigorous education and training business, and as such, set out to forge partnerships with other businesses and industries that are the future of this rural community. At a time when many country towns are being stripped of people and resources, the relationship is unambiguous. Bernadette O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, explains:

We have a vested interest in helping our businesses perform better and grow. Strong businesses mean a strong community. People will not leave town if our businesses are healthy. This means resources will also stay. Services, schools, whatever other community-based services we have, will remain and not be taken away.

With a population of 10,000, Colac is 150 kms south west of Melbourne and the largest town in the Colac-Otway Shire, which all up sustains a total population of 20,000. Colac is surrounded by high quality agricultural land where primary industries as diverse as dairy, meat, grains, vegetables, timber, fishing and aquaculture flourish. This base has attracted a strong food-processing industry. Powdered milk, cheese, ice cream, packaged meat and sawn timber by-products are all produced in Colac and sold across Victoria and Interstate. The Colac-Otway Shire sells meat, grains and seafood to international markets.

Australia-wide, government policy and competition is driving a demand for more high quality, ongoing training of industry workers and management. Colac is not exempt. The food industry insists on high standards in food processing, handling and hygiene from a workforce with a poor history of formal training.

Background

In 1979, the *Colac Herald* advertised Colac ACE's first education program to the community. The suite of eight courses on offer were art, pottery, yoga, creative writing, weaving, embroidery, lock-a-hook and an amateur radio certificate. Twenty-one years later, Colac ACE generates more than 4000 enrolments per annum and is one of the largest community-based and managed training providers in Victoria. In addition to general adult education programs like those first on offer in 1979, Colac ACE organises foundation education (such as literacy, English language courses, and adult VCE classes) and accredited and non-accredited training programs for the business sector. Courses and programs for industry are now a quarter of their total effort.

The value of Colac ACE to business was first tapped ten years ago with the implementation of State funded Workplace Basic Education programs followed by the federally subsidised Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programs. As in other rural communities, many of Colac's mature-aged workers left school early to work on farms or in factories but new workplace demands required higher level literacy skills. WELL programs targeted those needs. For many enterprises, WELL programs continue to be the platform for launching ongoing learning programs and accompanying workplace reform. One experienced tutor who has worked across four industries describes a common pattern of transformation:

Once a business has done some training, they will tend to branch out into more training. They might start with an adult literacy program and then go onto Quality Assurance and Occupational Health and Safety. In some cases the tutor may help employees build their Quality Assurance program from the floor up. Then because

someone has to be made responsible for updating the business's Quality Assurance program they might need computer training. A couple of Leading Hands might also be put through a Workplace Leadership program. And then, of course, there are the traineeships.

Colac ACE builds social infrastructure

For Colac ACE, WELL programs were just the beginning. In the last decade Colac ACE has developed the *social* infrastructure of the business community which is essential to make the most of training opportunities for employees. As Colac ACE and local businesses talk to and listen to one another, pool and share resources, develop confidence in each other based on accumulated experience of working together, and pursue the common good of the Colac district, they increase social infrastructure through overlapping networks. That social infrastructure is social capital.

Colac ACE describes the building blocks of those networks as partnerships and is clear about what it must bring to those partnerships. First, it must have training expertise or mechanisms to access that expertise. To meet changing training demands, professional development of staff at Colac ACE is ongoing and a network of external consultants is readily available to supplement in-house resources. Second, it has responsibility to plan for the future training needs of Colac's business community. Colac ACE can:
'look four or five years down the track at any one time and say where is business and industry going to be and what does this mean for training and education to our businesses now?'

Third, reciprocal practices must engender trust. As one tutor bluntly put this, trust is built on performance:
You can talk as much as you like up front and do the social bit. But if you don't deliver, then they don't trust you. You've got to deliver from day one. And you've also got to allow them the say in what's being delivered. So the trust is also about listening to what employers say and then building a training program that meets their needs.

At Colac ACE rhetoric about trust and reciprocity translates into diverse practice. Colac ACE has forged three very different kinds of partnership in the business sector. The following sections tell the stories of these partnerships, and outline the benefits they bestow on participants. The first is a network that draws together businesses from the same industry across several regional communities in Western Victoria to find ways of meeting training needs. The second partnership is also a training network but is restricted to a diverse range of local Colac businesses that want to improve their workers' skills and knowledge. The third is a 'micro-level' partnership between Colac ACE and a food processing plant that has not only changed workplace practices for the better, but has transformed the lives of workers. Together the three partnerships make up the multilevel approach Colac ACE takes to developing the social infrastructure necessary to effectively contribute to industries that sustain the region.

Businesses reach out to pull together

Getting access to appropriate training or even to useful information about training requirements is a challenge businesses in rural Western Victoria share with much of regional Australia.

Members of the Victorian Western District Laundry and Dry Cleaning Industry Network are successfully working together to overcome these hurdles. Colac ACE was instrumental in forming this network over two years ago and continues to be an active member.

The impetus for its establishment was a 12-month government-funded *Framing the Future* initiative, one of many projects under this banner funded through an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) scheme. Its purpose was to develop skills to support the implementation of the Laundry and Dry Cleaning Training Package. The Australian Light Manufacturing Industry Training Advisory Board approached Colac ACE to link laundries and dry cleaners through a network. Why? Colac ACE was already organising training in association with a local laundry.

Membership includes businesses in the towns of Portland, Hamilton, Colac, Warrnambool, and Geelong. They range in size from small enterprises with fewer than half a dozen employees to medium-sized businesses of approximately 40 workers. By pooling resources and planning training programs collaboratively, the group uses its collective purchasing power to overcome the difficulties of distance and expense.

Regular face-to-face dialogue between employers and tutors of Colac ACE at a forum increases mutual understanding of the dry cleaning and laundry businesses, and of the benefits that training brings to the workplace. The forum allows employers to have input into how they want to incorporate training into their businesses and more "ownership" of training programs.

Isabel, the tutor who has developed an ongoing relationship with the businesses, describes the role of Colac ACE in the Network as follows:
It enables us, the providers of education, to clarify the needs of industry and perhaps also sometimes to expand the needs of industry. It also allows us to discuss with employers the processes of the formal education system. Flexible as it is, there are still certain things that happen in certain ways which the average employer doesn't really have an understanding of. So it enables the two bodies to really closely and directly communicate with each other.

More than 12 months after Federal funding dried up; the Network meets regularly and is supported by regional ACFE Board funding because it gets results for its members. For the first time, highly specialised courses are delivered in the country. One such course is a Certificate course in the Safe Use of Perchlorethylene. In the past people made two costly trips to Melbourne to undertake this training. Travel, several nights of accommodation, lost work time and family disruption were a high price to pay. The Network brought a trainer from Melbourne to Hamilton. Ten more people now have a qualification, which once was optional but is now becoming mandatory.

The Network brings expert assessors to the region to assess experienced but non-accredited workers. Apart from recognising the skills and knowledge of workers with up to 25 years experience, this initiative had wider benefits. Supervisors with the appropriate accreditation now assess trainees in the workplace. Colac ACE has textile care traineeships on its scope of registration and workplaces have qualified employees. This gives the laundry and dry-cleaning industry in Western Victoria local resources to meet training needs.

Businesses connect to act for the common good

The Colac Industry Training Network is a grassroots network that began with no external funding. As the first formal structure to successfully unite industries for a common purpose it holds particular significance to the business community of Colac.

Three years ago discussions between Colac ACE and local businesses in the manufacturing, transport and storage industries highlighted the need for a combined business community approach to workplace learning. To be sustainable they believed all industries in Colac had to respond proactively to the demands made by national and international competition. Forward thinking businesses argued that training was a critical component to that response. In particular management expertise across businesses had to be strengthened. Some businesses had not yet embraced training and others did not have the financial wherewithal to do so. Discussions of this nature led to an alliance between the Colac Industry Training Network, Colac-Otway Shire and Colac ACE.

Colac Industry Training Network, as recorded in the minutes of its first meeting in early 1997, aims to:
establish a system through which Colac Otway industries can rationalise investment in training that

- *is relevant to industry, companies and individual employees*
- *responds to both convergent and divergent education and training needs*
- *and is of the highest quality.*

For two years Colac ACE convened regular meetings, provided the administrative support and maintained a mailing list of over 80 businesses. These interactions have strengthened relationships between businesses and of course, between businesses and Colac ACE. Results are tangible.

Businesses use the Network to promote the benefits of training and professional development to their peers. Enterprises that once had few or no training programs now provide their workforce with more and better opportunities to learn. In response to requests made by the Training Network to Colac ACE, customised training programs were implemented. For example, Colac ACE has twice delivered a Leadership Development program to over 40 participants. It has arranged for external consultants to deliver specialised and well-attended professional development in Strategic Planning and Business Planning.

The Training Network created and maintains social

infrastructure for Colac ACE to attract external resources to develop the skills and knowledge base of Colac. For example, because the Training Network identified the need for management training for businesses, Colac ACE successfully bid for training programs under the Federal and State Governments' Frontline Management Initiative.

Micro-businesses with fewer than five employees have also benefited from the Training Network's capacity to attract funding. WELL funding to deliver programs to clusters of small businesses has meant that this often-neglected sector has access to resources that previously only benefited bigger businesses.

In the last 12 months, formal meetings of the Colac Industry Training Network were suspended. Regular interaction between Colac ACE and businesses continues and includes a tutor who visits businesses one day a week to keep in touch and talk about their training needs. Andrew, the tutor, stresses the importance of direct, ongoing contact to maintaining relationships and cites the high return rate of a recent survey as evidence of its value:
I went around to different businesses and hand delivered 50 letters to find out what they would like to do in the near future with Colac ACE. There was a self-addressed envelope and out of 50 letters I had something like 43 sent back.

The Training Network continues. Just prior to the researcher's visit a large timber concern contacted Colac ACE asking it to let the Network know that vacant places were available on an externally sourced training program organised for employees.

Recently, businesses in Colac have taken the first steps to form an economic development board. The board aims to develop the existing businesses in Colac and to attract investment into Colac. Training and professional development will be a focus. The Colac Industry Training Network may be superseded by the board but from the perspective of Colac ACE, the Network has done its job in drawing the business community together, and the connections it made has formed new and responsive mechanisms.

Learning transforms workplace and lives

Maitre De Gourmet Foods, a medium-sized food processing plant established almost 20 years ago has strongly supported the Network. *Maitre De* employees work hard. At 6.30 am workers and machines begin processing chicken into kievs, schnitzels, kebabs and other culinary delights for restaurant and home tables in Victoria and interstate.

More than six years ago, *Maitre De* enlisted the support of Colac ACE so the enterprise could rise to the more rigorous and exacting demands of the food processing industry. From the delivery of the first literacy and numeracy program, the relationship has continued uninterrupted. Training in Communication, Occupational Health and Safety, and Quality Assurance; Leadership Development; Traineeships; and Level 3 Certificates in Food Processing are part and parcel of working at *Maitre De*.

The partnership between Colac ACE and *Maitre De* has gone beyond the delivery of courses. A couple of years ago, Colac ACE helped employees develop formal communication structures within the company itself. Sue from Colac ACE recalls the process:
We talked about what had been used in the past. People discussed what they thought the problems with it had been. And then we talked about what might be a better way to do it. So the end result was basically the implementation of a process that allowed for the development of a consultative committee. We identified who would be the appropriate people to go onto that consultative committee and what sort of a process would be used for the workers to feed information to those people whose job would then be to take those issues to the monthly meetings.

With the consultative committee and the communication channels in place, further work was done to embed the new structure. For 12 months Sue worked with the staff on communication skills. To model good meeting procedures she facilitated the monthly meetings.

More than one year after Sue withdrew from the process, monthly meetings continue. The new manager chairs the meetings and staff take turns to compile the agenda and write up minutes.

Ask the workers if their work with Colac ACE has made a difference and the answer is a resounding *Yes!* First there are the more visible changes. Workers are more aware of hygiene and sanitation issues and attention to the quality of the product has increased. New workplace practices discussed at the monthly meetings are implemented. Accidents have dramatically decreased.

One employee noted the difference since he began working at *Maitre De* seven years ago:
When I first started we had people cutting themselves heaps of times. We hardly have any people cutting themselves now. I can't remember the last one that's had to have stitches. With the programs we've got in, it's been very good.

Second, there are changes that are best described as personally empowering. One of the supervisors observed that workers come back from training more able to comment critically on practices or issues of their workplace:
The training gives them something to fall back on to say, 'Well, this has got to do with such and such. So shouldn't we be doing it?'

Those who participated in the Leadership Development Program through the Colac Industry Training Network know their communication and negotiation skills have been boosted. Training has unexpectedly connected one worker professionally with people in similar roles in other businesses in the community. He no longer feels isolated and has developed an appreciation of commonalities across similar positions in industries that are very different from his own.

Employees talk about the positive change their learning with Colac ACE has wrought in their personal lives. For many, successful learning experiences have helped change the debilitating beliefs about learning and about themselves that lack of schooling or school failure produced. Increased confidence in dealing with personal, family and social issues is the most repeated benefit that people cite. One employee in his late 20s began training with Colac ACE three years ago. Work related training prompted him to enrol in evening courses as well. He speaks of the changes in his personal life that he directly attributes to confidence gained from learning through Colac ACE. It is clear that the outcomes of his learning experience are not only personal gains but also community benefits:
I wouldn't even answer the phone at home once. Now it's no problem.

Once I would just have played cricket. Now I'm the Vice President of the Cricket Club. I've got responsibilities. I run the till, I run the bar.

I also got the Darts Club up and running. Had to organise the venue, the boards. Organise to get players in there, making sure the venue didn't get wrecked from the darts and that on the wall.

I wouldn't have given things like that a thought once. Wouldn't even have entered my mind to take on responsibilities like that. Besides, no one would have asked me anyway.

The employees the researcher met are confident about the future of *Maitre De* and about their own futures. *Maitre De* is on the eve of a major expansion that will generate additional jobs for the community. Max the manager, and Keith the owner, agree that ongoing training and professional development especially in food science, communication and management, are essential in this next stage of the company's growth. In this, Colac ACE is a partner.

Conclusion

Colac ACE contributes to community wellbeing

This chapter ended with the story of a particular company and stories of individual men and women. This makes the point that Colac ACE's contribution to its community must be described in terms of the benefits that *individuals*, directly or indirectly, derive from its policies, programs and practices. The stories of Colac ACE show that the benefits to community members are of two kinds: direct benefits experienced by learners and their employers in the workplace; and flow-on benefits enjoyed by other members of the community. The individual's unavoidable membership of 'multiple communities' mentioned by Bernadette O'Connor, guarantees the multiplier effect of positive learning experiences.

At the outset we said we would explore the contribution of ACE to community wellbeing in terms of eight factors: health; education and learning; employment and quality of working life; time and leisure; command over goods and services; physical environment; social environment; and personal safety.

Colac ACE contributes directly and indirectly to all eight aspects of wellbeing through its work with the business community. But its most direct, obvious and powerful contributions are in the areas of 'education and learning' and 'employment and quality of working life'.

Colac ACE works with management in making workplaces safe, effective and satisfying places to be in, with systems that encourage employees to have a voice in their personal and company wellbeing. More generally, Colac ACE contributes to the sustainability of Colac by helping build the skill and knowledge base of its people to better compete in the market place.

Colac ACE builds social capital

The personal stories told here stem from 'behind the scenes' work by Colac ACE. Drawing together effective networks and nurturing beneficial relationships grow social capital – the necessary precondition for individual stories to materialise. Colac's social capital generates access to training and learning opportunities at work.

Access to training and learning in rural areas is difficult for several reasons. Communities endure loss of social capital as government and corporate policies are more and more geared to improve the bottom line at the expense of rural infrastructure. Local training expertise is often inadequate and so is the financial where with all to buy in training. Economies of scale are often out of the question for small business and local ignorance about training and its benefits to business is common.

Colac ACE has turned these weaknesses around, transforming local resources into the kind of social capital that removes impediments to access. Whether the networks and partnerships stretch across communities or across industries or across the employer and employee divide, they open up access to training in this part of rural Australia. External resources, especially government funding, are tapped purposefully; local resources are extended; and local attitudes to training are changing. Those who own and manage businesses are learning new productive ways of interacting and collaborating with one another, transforming the way they see themselves in relation to their local community and globally.

A desire for the common good links Colac ACE to its partners. Colac ACE contributes local, high quality training opportunities. Trust is engendered as Colac ACE delivers the goods. Boundaries associated with personal, geographic or industry 'comfort zones' are crossed over. Members of the groups *have and use* their resources in ways that are beneficial to the group as a whole. Because Colac ACE has interacted with Colac business, the capacity of Colac ACE to transform workplaces and the people within them has expanded. Colac businesses and Colac ACE build community together.

A parting word

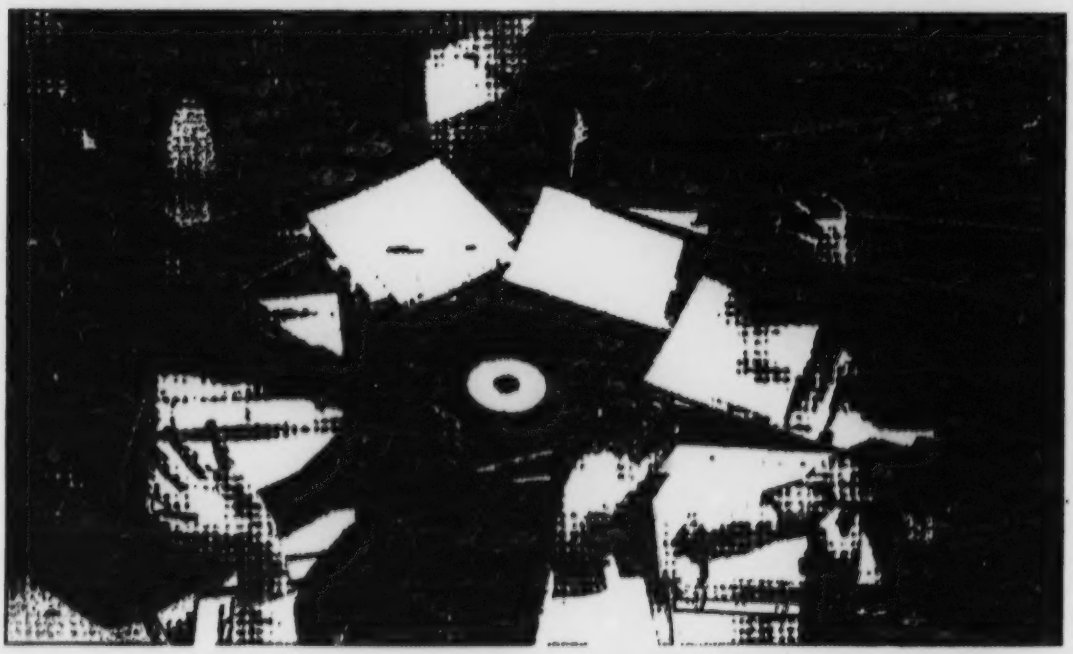
My final engagement in Colac was a social function where I met the Human Resource Manager of a large transport company that carries the produce and manufactured products of Colac and surrounding districts to markets Australia-wide. We talked about the value of training and the logistical difficulties of implementing programs for drivers, especially long distance drivers. He said, 'So, what we've done is, we've teed up Colac ACE to do training with our blokes on a Sunday morning.' It came as no surprise when he added, 'You see, Colac ACE is community based. It knows what the community needs.'

Adult Education
In the Community

FOUR

Connecting young Koories to their community:

Coorong Tongala Course
Robinvale Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group



The Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in Robinvale uses the Coorong Tongala Course to transform levels of well being in young Koorie (Indigenous) early school leavers. This Koorie portrait, nominated by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), shows how a Koorie ACE organisation and the Robinvale Koorie community work towards a learning community of common purpose and establish trust in young, marginalised Koorie people. The ACE organisation, the curriculum and the context come together around the learning and cultural needs of Koorie young people. Encouragement of learning not only engenders confidence, literacy and computer skills, but also sets up networks with and involves families, the wider Koorie community and the town community.

I'd love to see those the first batch of kids in three ... a healthy happy young family whether they're labourers or ... they're league footballers as long as they are happy ... and basically that's all it's about.

(Koorie Coorong Tongala Course De... the course)

Introduction

Many diverse communities, with their own cultural practices and common purposes, are part of the larger Victorian ACE community. As in any other community, a common purpose is a precondition for setting and sharing norms in an Indigenous community. This portrait teases out ways in which Koorie cultural practice and wellbeing are enhanced, and social capital is encouraged, when a Koorie ACE organisation addresses the special needs of early school leavers in an isolated Victorian community.

An 'oasis' of irrigation surrounds the small township of Robinvale in the Mallee region of northern Victoria.[1] In pre-contact times the area was home to the Tati Tati Aboriginal nation. Without irrigation from the Murray River, this area, in the terms of the conquering peoples, was semi desert. Until the 1950s many of the local Koorie (Aboriginal) people, who now comprise around ten per cent of the local Robinvale population, lived on the river banks or at the Manatunga 'Mission', attracted by seasonal work. Most Koorie people in the Robinvale district now live in town,[2] primarily in areas where the overall labour force participation rate is low, and are an important reason why Robinvale's culture is unusually diverse for an isolated town in remote northern Victoria.

In the 1950s, 'Soldier Settlement' around Robinvale led to another round of forceful removal from traditional lands. Fifty years later a small amount of land was 'handed back'. Koorie people now have access to the comprehensive services of the community-run Aboriginal 'Co-op'. The Robinvale Koorie population is today skewed towards youth.[3] Robinvale's total population of 1400 is just big enough to support a secondary college, which most Koorie young people attend in early secondary years. Their high rates of early school leaving and dislocation from their community are a source of serious concern.

On one level, the town is booming. The main street is busy. New irrigation areas and new housing abound. Behind that facade, the census data[4] for Robinvale indicates that the district has high levels of recent disadvantage.[5] On many key indicators, Koories are particularly at risk.

Painting the ... are ...

For a wide range of reasons, virtually all Koorie youth in Robinvale leave school well before finishing Year 12. The level of concern about early school leaving is so high that the local community has recently completed a Koorie education strategy plan,[6] with a raft of recommendations to try to turn the situation around. In a nutshell, there is widespread recognition that the current secondary schooling has been far from culturally inclusive, and that the Koorie community has to be part of the solution.

This is where the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) and the centre it coordinates came into the picture. In 1999 the centre offered the 'Coorong Tongala' Course, with ACFE Board funding, for the first time. Coorong Tongala shared a site with programs and workers funded by other sources: the Mentor Program funded by VAEAI,[7] the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel, the Aboriginal Parent Support Group, and more recently the multicultural 'Living in Harmony' Program.

The Coorong Tongala course, known for national accreditation purposes as Certificate I in Koorie

Education, is designed to meet the needs of Koorie people at Australian Qualifications Framework Level I. The course is culturally and structurally suited to the education needs of young Indigenous people. It is a pathway to Certificate II in Koorie Education, Training and Employment and to other Certificate II courses and can therefore be used as part of the Certficates in General Education for Adults.

Lil, the LAECG Chair and centre manager explains some of the impacts of early school leaving, and the community rationale for trying to do something. As with all interviewees, Lil's comments are reported as spoken. It is important that non-Indigenous Australians recognise and understand Koorie English as a fully developed linguistic system.[8] Indeed, attempts to 'correct' it in school have a detrimental effect on Koorie students. As Lil says:

A lot of our youths have left school, walkin the streets, can't cope at school for whatever reasons and I just thought: "Well, we need to do something", to get them into a program so they can, you know, learn something, and a lot of it's to learn respect of themselves and other people. So it's to keep them busy.

Lil considers that the local school:

... just doesn't cater for the need of a lot of the Koorie students. I think a lot of the problem boils down from the primary school ... we're been trying to deal with the last twenty years, to try and change it.

Mildura, the nearest secondary school alternative, is too far (90 km) away. The LAECG chose to operate their own 'school', based around the Coorong Tongala course, from a classroom behind rented shopfront premises in Robinvale's main street. The course was funded by the ACFE Board as a result of a successful 1998 national pilot program[9] that aimed 'to show that 'Indigenous student learning outcomes could be improved, in a short period of time, through concentrated effort'.

There is a special local connection with Coorong Tongala. The Coorong Tongala course designer is a local Koorie who developed and wrote the course in association with a Koorie consortium called Mutti Mara. They wanted 'to provide accredited training for Koorie people wishing to gain training in a field relevant to their community and to develop skills for accessing further training, education and employment.'[10] In the Course Designer's words the course was to:

... act as a tool to help regenerate spirituality and identity, and for ... local communities to put their own mark on the program through creative use of resources, facilities and delivery modes. ... We're the best people writing these sort of programs. ... What we've got to do is have something that 'sticks up' at people, right from the terminology and language and words that we use, right to where they can learn it. The whole philosophy of the Coorong Tongala is the responsibility and ownership of the learner.

The Course Designer explains the origin of the course name.

I thought, 'It's gotta start at the mouth, the mouth of the Murray, into the sea'...Tongala...is a Wiradjuri word for 'people over there'. But the Tongala comes from the pathway of the Murray, which is Yorta Yorta...We thought that would get...ownership to more than one group, cultural ownership.

Since the program is 'owned' by the community and the students themselves, there has to be some agreed norms. Lil explains that:

...a lot of teenagers want to be their own bosses. Don't want to take direction from anybody...So we're trying to instill a little bit of life skills and a bit of pride and respect in themselves, so they can sort of cope a bit better so they don't turn to drug and alcohol.

The process involved some initial negotiation with the students to set community norms, which were necessarily different from those at school.

...it's all new, because, you know, they're gotta be corrected to...we're gotta install the rules straight up. First we sort of had a bit of discussion with staff [who said] 'That type of rules are at school', and I said 'We've got to have rules, everyone's got to live by rule'.

Lil stresses that the staff are trying to create an environment where students feel like they can:

... get up and go to get dressed up to come to this school. Where they're not feeling the pressures a lot on them. So whatever the problems they got, we've tried to bring that out. So we bring other speakers, and you know, to come in and talk with them. But, I think the kids are comin out of their shell more and being more respectful to each other and that. That's what a lot of its learnin's about too. Yeah. That's good. It's a hard job, but we're getting there.

The Course Designer explains that the course is built around flexible, achievable goals and Koorie norms.

A lot of our people, you know, can't sustain concentration on a course for say a three-month period. And that's

for a lot of family reasons, cultural reasons, whole host of socioeconomic reasons...So you can enrol, finish off one module or two modules, or a section of the course. And then go ... do your seasonal fruit picking ... or have your baby, or mourn a loved one for, you know, probably a bit longer than usual, get over that and get back and do the course, where you don't hinder the progress of the others.

The Course Designer stresses the importance of the course to the Robinvale community.
It gives ownership and responsibility, a big issue in any culture, in any race, in any form. We haven't had a lot of that. Aboriginal people all over the country, Indigenous people all over the world haven't had the chance to make decisions and directions for their, ourselves. This course gives the LAECG ... a lot of strength in deciding how they're going to go about it. It gives them ... like the funding agreement is very, very broad and flexible. They don't have to teach it like, you know they do in the white schools. This can be taught in the philosophy of the way it's written, to suit our needs.

Asked to outline the differences the course has made to participants in the Robinvale context, the Course Designer continues:
... they seem different, like totally different kids. There's a different outlook, they are more inquisitive ... like kids that I know and see you know, when they're ten they're runnin the streets and thievin and smokin and drinkin and all that. They're probably still doin that to a degree, not as bad, but their sort of outlook is different. They can hold a conversation with an adult, they can.

You can ring up the LAECG, they will pick up the phone, and say "Robinvale LAECG", and show a professional side. But it's not so much a professional side, [they] show a side which is, you know, an adaptive side [which says] that we want to learn, we want to survive in the 90s, in the year 2000, so we're gonna have to learn to read.

... I think it's successful not only for the participant, but

... for the organisation, for the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, because it's sort of a hell of a lot of priority ... since its been written. And for it to run successfully it sort of like ... gives them a big lift, it gives them somethin good to talk about.

When Aunty Lil[11] and others go away for meetings around the state with the state education groups and that, it gives them pride that one of their own has written the course, and they're teaching it probably best of the State. So it's that pride and ownership responsibility thing again.

Lil sees the fact that kids actually want to come as the highlight of the program.
I think the high point is getting the kids ere and seeing them ere. And turnin up, that's, you know, even one or two ... next minute there's alf a dozen and then there's ten of them. And then sometimes there's an incident and they get on one another's nerve then you think 'Oh why bother?' You know, we could be takin, things easy without havin all this, you know, carryin you know, all this going on. But you soon get over this quickly, because it's the kids that come first. Young peoples come first. Yep.

Lil attributes much of the success to the:
... more friendly atmosphere. ... more ... culturally relevant for the kid to come ere and the parent to come in ere. Because of its feel. You don't come full stop when you come in; you're not coming to a receptionist. You just see me and people are down the back in the kitchen so people go straight through. So they feel comfortable in this place.

Asked to explain what is it about the LAECG that makes it successful in running the Coorong Tongala program, the Course Designer points to its open friendliness and inclusiveness. 'They do things appropriately'.
... you go to [the local] primary school, white Anglo kids, middle-class kids, will survive and do well because they look around them, what do they see? They don't see anyone out of their own world ... who's standing in front of their class? An Anglo-Saxon. The language used in the whole school is Anglo: English/Anglo-Saxon you know stuff. The tradition and rules and everything is all to do with their world. So you know, someone different like a 'blackfellow' or Tongan, or Italian, or Greek, or Turk is going to have difficulty, great difficulty in that school.

Robert explains how it is

Robert, one of the students in the course, explains how it used to be for him at the secondary school.
The teachers didn't like me. They just look at Koories like they're nothin...I just walked out of the class. Told the teacher to get f.....d. Because I put my hand up, I was the first person to put my hand up to ask for help and another student put his hand up and he went straight to

him and I was sitting there with my hand up nearly all period. So I just went up and walked out...I lose my temper, like it's got a short thing...When I get angry I start swinging and hit people. I just keep hittin and hittin them.

Robert's short fuse had its roots in his childhood experiences, and had caused problems in and outside of school since. Robert explains he had moved from town to town all his life and had been 'heaps of trouble' with the police since he was twelve for 'Breakin and entering, more assaults, theft of a motor car and just all that. All that stuff'. He suggests that the police '... are real dirty on me, because they hate me, and they want me to get out of town ... They just don't like me'

What happened to Robert at school was the last straw. 'So I said, "Look, can I come here?" They said "Yeah." Coming here keeps me out of trouble. I haven't been in trouble for two months now'.

Robert reports that coming to school at the LAECG had helped '... my readin. Yes. helping me out with that. My times and that, times tables, helped me out with that too'. Asked to elaborate on what it felt like coming, Robert said 'It feels good. ... Like my anger starts to like calm down a bit. I don't like just ... I used to get real angry, walk out the door and do somethin stupid like smash a window, or break into somethin. Go for a joy ride or somethin. ... I don't do that now'. As part of the course, Robert works at the Robinvale Aboriginal Cooperative with the other boys in the Coorong Tongala course. 'Go down to the Co-op, wash cars, wash windows, vacuum, sweep out. ... I trust heaps of people now. I just trust. Like I can talk to them. I got heaps of friends. ....I've got heaps of Italian mates, Tongan mates. I got heaps'. Next year Robert wants to play football and basketball. 'Try and make it to the AFL.'

Interestingly, Robert and the other students, like Lil and other staff, consistently called the LAECG 'school' without needing to distinguish it from the local secondary college. It was as if they did not recognise the legitimacy of the local secondary school. Asked about this, the Course Designer explains that the local school:

...is something which is totally alien to them, the way the teachers speak to them, the way they are treated, the way they are always, if you like, let [it be] known that they are Aboriginal by the way they are singled out as a group of Indigenous people. They are not treated as a student, they're treated as a Koorie, as an Indigenous person. So you automatically are, you know, underachiever, you're an automatic truant. And that's the way they're classified and are treated in school. Now right or wrong, that is the truth.

...in Robinvale...they can't trust the teachers, they can't trust anything. So when they look at the situation they call their 'school', and their environment, you know trust is probably the first thing, cause they can trust that Aunty Lil's going to listen to them. If they want to change something on the schedule, they can trust that their word is gonna be listened, they gonna get a hearing. They might get 'No' a lot of the times, too, and they do from Aunty Lil, but the thing about it is they are gonna get a hearing...So there is respect there, respect for personal need, personal you know, social environments at the time.

The Course Designer and Lil summarise

The Course Designer elaborates why trust had emerged as a major issue in the interviews with Robert and other students.

Look, Robinvale is a small community, it's very close knit...I'm not only pointing the finger at the school life, but a lot of the life around them, you know, is not very trustworthy...Even in terms of adults, why do they experiment in drugs or whatever, alcohol and cigarettes and wonder when they're nine, ten, eleven because it's made available to them. So they grow up with a mistrust of a lot of people.

So when they go into an environment they know, they look in the person's eye and say, you know, you really care. And these kids will say that to me out on camp. 'You know, you don't have to be here...You do it cause you care, don't ya' and I say 'Well just you saying that, makes it worthwhile, that's better than getting a thousand bucks to bring you's out to bush'. So, it doesn't surprise me about trust, given the backgrounds, not only in schools, but unfortunately, a lot of family life is not very safe and trustworthy.

Lil explains the relation between the course's intention and its practice.

When the Course Designer wrote the course...the commission to run an education program for kids that left school, kids had low, really low self-esteem and low education and that. And he put it all in so that you can chop and change the module the way to suit your area. And to suit your kid...

And there's lot to learn in life skills as well. Cause the kids are learning somethin that their parents are not teaching them...So they're learnin a lot about themselves, a lot about their self respect and life skills that they can cope with. They take a little more pride in their appearance, dress sense and...their manners and that. And even just involved in other people around instead of just bein with that one group. Their own little group out in their own little world.

The community socialisation process is critical and the expected norms well beyond the classroom.
But you always...correct them about spitting on the footpath and you gotta pull em up, cause nobody...They want that too. They want a little bit of direction; they want a little bit of discipline. 'Cause there's nobody else there that's doin it, nobody else there that's pulling them up and correctin them. They won't know, so you've got to tell them all the time. And they always know that, 'Oh here comes Aunty Lil.'

The emphasis on getting students to attend has a lot to do with being consistent, as Lil explains:
One day there were no students turned up. And they said no one turned up, so you get on the phone and I'm ringing all around, 'Get that lazy bugger out of bed and down here, shake a leg', and I mean, we give them an hour and here they're comin down.

... if we didn't worry about them and we didn't want them to turn up...they would think 'Oh well, who cares, nobody care about me. I don't have to turn up to school'. But when they know you're going around there knockin on their doors or ringing them up. I think they stop and think ... somebody do cares, if they want to have a bit of education or learn something.

Standing back ...

Early school leaving by Koorie youth in Robinvale is a manifestation of a well known and worsening national phenomenon which goes well beyond, but which is particularly noticeable in, Australian Indigenous communities. Early school leaving has a high cost, estimated at $74 000 per young person: half borne by the early school leaver and governments over a lifetime, and the remaining half experienced as a social cost which falls across the individual, government and the whole community.[12] There is a high cost associated with an early loss of shared norms and common purpose.

The historic loss of shared norms in the wider Koorie community is reflected in social disadvantage at an individual level for young people in the Coorong Tongala course and in the Robinvale Koorie community. It is evident also at a macro level. A recent study of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales[13] revealed a significant, positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between leaving school before age 15 and a number of social indicators: in particular between levels of low income, unskilled workers, unemployment, and defendants before courts. When a suite of such indicators are combined into a 'risk score' of social disadvantage, it becomes apparent that high social disadvantage correlates strongly with a high proportion of Aboriginal people in the population in particular areas of both States.

A wide range of studies of early school leaving confirms that Indigenous Australians '... are substantially more likely to leave school early ... even when controlling for socio-economic background and school achievement'.[14] To be Aboriginal is to be subject to 'social or cultural norms regarding early school leaving, pessimism about their ability to remain at school, a lack of encouragement to do so, or a feeling that remaining at school would not 'pay off' either in terms of further education or better jobs'.[15] Programs like Coorong Tongala which create a community of common purpose and reinforce shared norms have the potential to address this disadvantage and break the inter-generational cycle at critical points.

Social capital is defined by Woolcock and Narayan[16] as the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively. Strategies that enhance identity, social and cultural norms and trust at a community as well as at an individual level can be seen as part of a wider strategy of investment in social capital. Giving access to employment, education, language skills, community involvement and social relationships has made a difference in a wide range of contexts in other parts of the world.[17]

Creation and implementation of the Coorong Tongala Course by the Koorie community is consistent with the long-standing, Koorie argument that program ownership of Indigenous learning communities can be directly linked to successful programs. As Mary Atkinson said in relation to the 1990 Koorie Education Policy in Victoria:
Participation in the decision making is critical to increasing involvement of Koorie families in the education process and the subsequent social and economic developments of their communities.[18]

It has to come from somewhere. The local Koorie community, linked by the LAECG and the Co-op, clearly has a close-knit and intensive stock of "bonding" capital they leverage to "get by".[19] Without external support they lack the more diffuse and extensive "bridging" social capital deployed by the non-poor to "get ahead."[20] External ACFE Board and ACFE Regional Council support for community curriculum development processes and funding for the program plays a critical part in this initiative. It is external and internal leverage in *combination*[21] that is responsible for the outcomes evident to, and reported by, participants and families associated with Coorong Tongala.

One reading of this program, as for the other portraits in this study, is that the Koorie community and the community owned and managed (ACE) sector have intervened in a situation where family, school and state have fallen down and retreated. ACE is distinctive because government funding and autonomous community owned and managed learning communities come together in partnership when governments must otherwise retreat.

Skocpol[22] argues that the state, in this case the local secondary school, acknowledges that it is ill-suited to assuming full responsibility for all aspects of modern life. The state finds an alternative way, in this case through a community owned and managed provider, to make a local program work.[23]

This reading of the situation suggests that the state is not only the ultimate provider of public goods—the provider of universal secondary education—but is best placed to facilitate alliances across boundaries: in this case to address inequalities associated with both socioeconomic status and culture. This interpretation assumes that civil society in Victoria thrives at the community level when the state actively encourages it and addresses inequality associated with the early school leaving. It also assumes that social capital is created by, for and within communities rather than being 'delivered' to communities as education and training.

There are other readings of Indigenous disadvantage, community determined aspirations and the capacity for social capital to address Indigenous wellbeing. Independent Indigenous education providers have argued that 'Aboriginal poverty...is not due to peoples' deficits in so called 'human capital', but to the lack of private or public sector support for alternative indigenous forms of social and economic organisation.[24]

A third reading of the situation might be that the act of early school leaving *per se* is not problematic. It can be argued that it is the both longer term consequences *and* the pre-disposing factors associated with early withdrawal from school that constitute the problem. There are well known causal links between social indicators such as early school leaving in the process behind the perpetuation of localised inequality and poverty. The degree to which trust is involved as a cause or an outcome in these links, as this chapter suggests, is less well known.

Galster[25] developed a cumulative causation model of the underclass phenomenon which suggests that those who leave school early are less likely to get stable secure jobs, or any job at all. They are also more likely, as Pretorious and Le Roux (1998) argue, 'to drop out of the labour force ... to experience hostility and distrust rather than neighbourliness with those around them. Since they are less likely to participate in meaningful groups and associations, they are further excluded from other communities of common purpose in work or in re-creation of identity'.[26]

'At the heart of the problem is the exclusion of people from certain parts of the labour market, particularly those positions with high wages, stability and security, compared with those sections marked by insecurity and little opportunity to advance'.[27] Koorie people with lowest education levels and skills in a knowledge-based society are not only isolated within their local communities. Their commitment as Koorie people to family and community place further constraints on their labour market opportunities and lead to spatial separation, in town and in the region. This, in turn, encourages further isolation and alienation from 'mainstream', non-Koorie people in a circular and self-reinforcing manner.[28]

It would be naive to see all of these 'problems' originating in the local government school. Nor are all the solutions provided by the ACFE Board funded Coorong Tongala curriculum. Social capital will not miraculously restock the Koorie community with common purpose through the work of ACE. What matters is that community leaders and government maintained *organisational integrity*. They identified and engaged a 'pocket of inefficiency' in the universal state school system, and made a strategic adjustment in the context of an emerging state crisis and a community

opportunity. Collaboration between the LAECG and ACFE has allowed both to become agents of a reform process which operates outside the system that failed the young Koories.

Second, it is the *embeddedness*[29] of the course in the LAECG and community learning environment that is significant. As the Coorong Tongala curriculum document argues, involvement in the decision making processes 'empowers and encourages community members to take an interest in the education and training being provided within their community'.[30]

Rather than secondary education taking place in isolation in a state-controlled 'black box' in the confines of the local secondary college, the program is occurring in people's collective faces in a Koorie community-owned-and-managed Indigenous learning community right in the Robinvale main street. As the Coorong Tongala curriculum document argues, 'The more members of the community who understand what is happening the more support participants will get to complete the program'.[31]

Young Koorie students confirm that transformation is happening to community wellbeing as defined by the OECD at an individual and family level when decisions are taken by a local, Koorie, community-controlled organisation regarding its own needs and its own solutions in its own learning community.

As Lil in effect says, We don't *have* to do this. The Coorong Tongala program involves local learning community will directed towards cultural and social renewal, and self-determined wellbeing. While the program is supported financially from the top, the program is in every other essence bottom-up consistent with Indigenous community development principles.[32] The ACE provider *is* the community of common purpose. As one of the ACFE Research Reference Committee members[33] commented as this research was being drafted, 'It is part of the genius of ACE '.

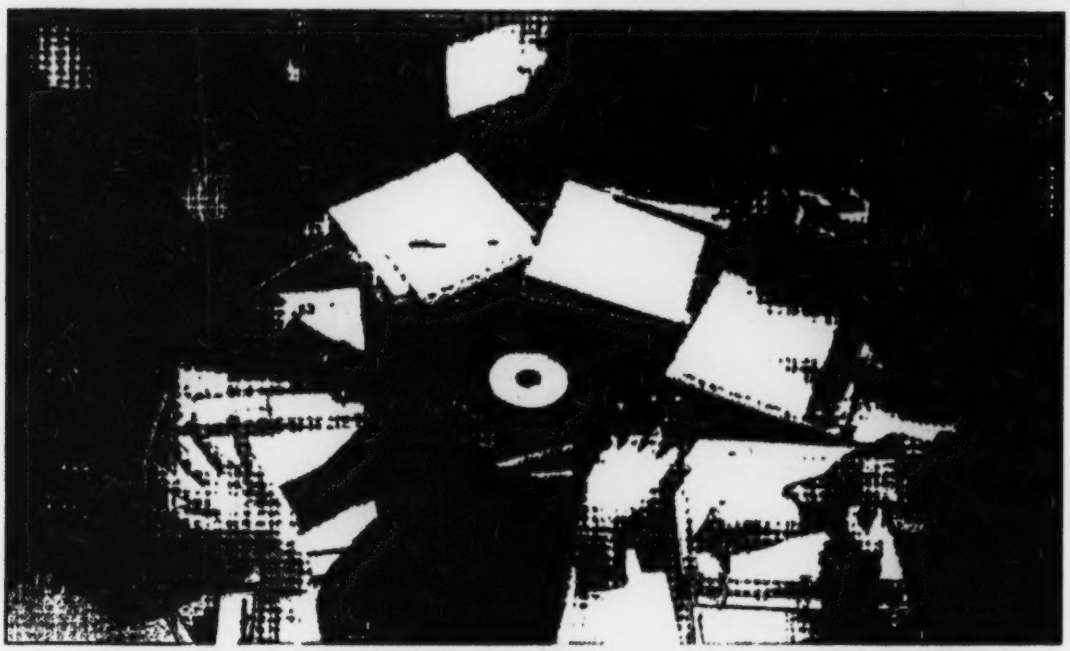
1 See Map 2 in the Appendix.
2 See Map 2 in the Appendix.
3 At the 1996 census around 50 per cent of the Indigenous population in Australia was under 19: cited in Boughton, B. 1998, *Alternative Pathways to Indigenous Development*, Review of Research, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, p. 15.
4 Robinvale Postcode 3549: 1996 population of 4072.
5 On three of nine key social disadvantage indicators, Robinvale was listed in the top 30 out of 622 postcodes in Victoria in Vinson, T. 1999, *Unequal in Life: The distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, The Ingatius Centre, Richmond.
6 *Time Out: An education strategy plan for Aboriginal Students in Robinvale*, Report by R. J. Cruise, Delphi Management Services, for the Robinvale Koorie Education Strategy Plan Steering Committee, 1999.
7 VAEAI: Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
8 See Brown, A.I. 1989, *Koorie English*, State Board of Education Victoria.
9 Via DETYA: Commonwealth Department of Education, Training, Employment and Youth Affairs: see SRP News, Spring 1998, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1.
10 *Coorong Tongala Resource Package*, November 1998, p.2.
11 The terms 'Auntie' and 'Uncle' are frequently used in Koorie contexts to refer to Elders who do not necessarily have that role in a European sense.
12 King, A. 1999, *The Cost to Australia of Early School Leaving*, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney.
13 Vinson, op. cit.
14 Marks, G. & Fleming, N. 1999, *Early School Leaving in Australia: Findings from the 1995 Year 9 LSAY Cohort*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, p.19.
15 ibid, p.26.
16 Woolcock, M. & Narayan, D. 2000, 'Social capital: implications for development theory, research and policy', Forthcoming, *World Bank Research Observer* vol. 15, no. 1), [cited from September 1999 Draft].
17 'Four steps to a better heroin strategy', Professor John Fitzgerald, *The Age*, 17 November 1999, p. 19.
18 Cited in the Coorong Tongala Resource Kit, op. cit.
19 'Brown kids in the white suburbs: Housing mobility and the multiple faces of social capital', X. Briggs, *Housing Policy Debate*, vol. 9, no. 1: pp. 177–221, 1998; R. Holzmann & S. Jorgensen, 'Social protection and social risk management', The World Bank: *Social Protection Discussion Paper*, no. 9901, 1999 cited in Woolcock & Narayan, op.cit., p. 4.
20 'Poverty in rural India: The contribution of qualitative research in poverty analysis', V. Kozel & B. Parker, Washington, DC, The World Bank, Mimeo, 1998; 'Enterprise performance and the functional diversity of social capital', A. Barr, Working Paper Series 98-1 (June), Institute of Economics and Statistics, University of Oxford, 1998; 'Bonds and deep bridges: the role of social capital in poverty reduction', Washington, DC, The World Bank, Mimeo cited in Woolcock & Narayan, op. cit., p. 4.
21 As argued in Woolcock & Naryan (2000), op. cit. p. 4.
22 Skocpol, T. 1996, 'Unravelling from above', *The American Prospect*, vol. 25, pp. 20–25.
23 See Tendler, J. 1997, *Good government in the tropics*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
24 Boughton, B. 1998, *Alternative VET pathways to indigenous development*, Review of Research, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide, p. 1.
25 Cited but not referenced in Vinson (1999) op. cit., p. 20.
26 'Milieu deprivation and its implications for education in the Republic of South Africa', J. Pretorious & J. Le Roux, *Adolescence*, vol 33, Fall, p. 689.
27 Vinson 1999, op. cit., p. 20.
28 Clearly summarised by Galster (1992) in Vinson (1999).
29 Evans, P. 1995, *Embedded Autonomy: States and industrial transformation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
30 Coorong Tongala Resource Package, November 1998, p. 4.
31 Coorong Tongala Resource Package, November 1998, p. 4.
32 See Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) 1999, *Partners in a learning culture* and Boughton 1999, op. cit., pp. 17–20.
33 Beata Peisker, Central Western Metropolitan Region, ACFE.

FIVE

Wellbeing of marginalised young people:

Future Connections

Bendigo



Future Connections is an ACE organisation in Bendigo dedicated to young people. This portrait investigates the relationship between youth education and wellbeing. Active and effective support, particularly from staff who model desired norms, can transform disadvantaged sub-groups of young, marginalised learners (ex-offenders, early school leavers, substance abusers). At Future Connections young students get accredited vocational training in a relaxed community setting. Social capital through community networking and collaboration of a dedicated youth provider is the vehicle for richer individual and community wellbeing.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Instead of leaving school with the shits we sort o

(Phil participant)

...it just calms you down heaps because there talk to.

(Alison Future con ons participant)

Future Connections

No external indicators on the building in an inner Bendigo suburb[1] tell you that inside, the wellbeing of many homeless young people is advancing apace. Future Directions, a former Skillshare provider, faced with closure in May 1998, chose to head off in a new direction, and flourished. The transformation of Future Connections into a youth-oriented education organisation paved the way for this study to find an outstanding example of the way trust is commended to young people, by staff who model trusting and trustworthy behaviour.

Youth unemployment[2] in Bendigo[3] is a striking patchwork of provincial city social difference. Some neighbourhoods, including a large area north of the city, have disproportionately high youth unemployment.

David, the training coordinator, explained that Future Connections offers integrated support, including customised education and training, for young people. Many are early school leavers, unemployed, homeless or at risk of homelessness. To get young people in such circumstances through the door, staff must address personal, social and community wellbeing. Support to 'hang in there' takes effort to straighten out higher order needs: personal safety, health, housing, money and even food. Future Connections has a freezer of donated food for emergency meals.

Curriculum options at the first point of contact are deliberately diverse and customised to meet individual need. For example, the 'RAD Program' includes art, carpentry, cooking, camps, social and outdoor activities, work experience and one-to-one support, counselling and referral for young people (between 15 and 25) who are either at school or unemployed. In David's words,

We figure that if we can begin to engage them: initially there may be little educational value in what they do, but they've begun to set a new pattern in their lives. And so through setting that new pattern, they then come to a place where we can work more effectively with them.

The focus of more effective work in education and training is on literacy and numeracy. Even so a more primary consideration is the safety and general wellbeing of young people.

Net rating, Trust

Future Connections fosters social capital indicators like trust, collaboration and networking. Highly developed, complex networks involving young people, staff, schools, service, community and training providers are visible. David explained his role in Future Connections in networking terms as:

... a bridge between Centrelink, the schools, all the other service providers, all the job network providers. My responsibility is to provide opportunities for young people to not just to have a one-off course, but to be able to go into a program which will enable them to follow pathways into other things.

David outlined the role of a number of collaborators: that is, people without whom the program either wouldn't work or be supported to work.

[Welfare] workers refer young people to us who may be in trouble, they might be young people from broken homes, or they might be in care. ... A number of young people come to us who are referred because they've been to court: they may have charges pending. It might be in their best interest to be doing something. Otherwise there may be a risk that they will be sent to a youth training centre.

If young people haven't got anything meaningful to do in their day, sure they're going to get in trouble. ... it doesn't matter how they've got into trouble. The main thing is that we can probably provide an appropriate pathway for them.

Staff are expected to place the wellbeing of such young people above arbitrary rules.
We've been able to wipe a whole lot of the superficial type stuff around the needs of young people away. Lots of rules and regulations don't exist here because we centre all of our activities. Our staff run this particular operation, to actually see the young person as the centre of what we do. ... So rather than prepare people for programs, we're preparing our programs for the young people that come to us.

Transformation of young people's wellbeing...

What brings so many young people to such an early crisis point in terms of their wellbeing? David thinks it's because:
Kids often become the victims in family breakdown...The other thing is that domestic violence tends to push children out of the family environment. Situations where both parents work is another pattern that I've observed, particularly where young people are left on their own for long periods.

Some young people that come to us really should be in the school system: many are academically able to be, however they are experiencing a lot of personal problems, just because of the fact that they're probably neglected at crucial times in their lives. Peer pressure is a big factor.

Unemployment and poverty are a matter of self-identity.
We've got to ask ourselves 'Why are they the ones who are out of work?' and 'Why are the other ones in jobs?' A lot of young people have come from marginalised backgrounds, which tends to lead a person to have a very low self-esteem, and a low opinion of themselves...a lot of it's to do with confidence.

David identified many ways in which the program addressed wellbeing including health, learning, recreational and leisure activities, employment, budgeting and life skills, and a safe and positive social environment. He picked up social capital indicators in what he said as well: trust and reciprocity (the ability to give and take) is important for young Koories in Robinvale and young homeless people in Bendigo.
Trust is very important. If you're talking about young people that come from a marginalised background.... If a young person can't develop a sense of trust in their home environment between the ages of one and two, the chances are that they may go through their adolescent years just really not trusting people. And it's important that we do think, or act in a manner as to earn a sense of trust. Our philosophy is that we have to earn the trust of the young people that we work with because they may feel that they have not been able to trust anybody. ... to engage people socially you need to be able to develop a sense of trust. ...

If you are generous, you find that young people are usually generous in return. We hope that this is something that they can take through their lives: that they're not concerned with only taking but also with generosity and giving.

David stressed the importance of building on established youth networks and groups.
We encourage groups to function and work together. We encourage young people to be self sufficient in some way through enterprise projects and enterprise learning. So therefore we're teaching them to think for themselves, we're teaching to question in a healthy way ... we're showing them to do the things they need to do as they go out and build their own lives.

Matt's wellbeing

Matt, a 17-year-old participant, explained how he came to Future Connections.
I went to...a very crowded school, they didn't have any time for any of their students...I didn't like it, it was just a shit school. So I left and went and worked (on the grapes). And when I come back I figured I would go to a school that was a lot more quiet. And apparently this school had a lot more time for their students.

Asked what his life was like when he first arrived at Future Connections, Matt explained.
I was ... had nothing. I was just living at one of my friend's houses. Not with my parents. And really had nothing to wake up for in the morning. So, thought I would find something. And work really got me nowhere. Got me money, but nothing permanent. So, I figured I would go into the Navy, but to get into the Navy I need-

ed a stronger education. So if I was going to get a stronger education, I might as well do me VCE[4] before getting into it. So yeah.

When I first came here I met David. And he was very polite and helped me out. Helped me, like he sat down and discussed the whole thing with me...Yeah, they took the time and let me work my way into school, instead of just jumping in.

Matt was asked what he had learnt and in what ways he felt different here at Future Connections.
Well personally, I'd have to say more confident. I'm not really scared about going to school or standing up in front of a crowd or anything like that. I used to be petrified of it. Rebecca's my teacher: she helps me out with finding a house, if I haven't got a house or anything like that. And [a counsellor] helped me out with an alcohol problem. And all that's just from coming to school. ... They helped. Helped out great. Like I was coming to school before I needed a place to stay, and before, well anything, I had a place to stay. And I just wanted to go to school. And just the benefits that have come along from it, it's been great.

Did that affect the way he related to other people, his family or to the community?
Oh yeah. I guess so. I guess I looked at things a bit differently. I don't know, it just seems like you've grown up more. Like everybody looks at things differently after a while. ... Like drinking, I used to think, yeah get pissed everyday, nothing wrong with it. And after a while it wasn't like that. It's stupid. Yeah I was doin stupid stuff...

During his interview with another student, Alison, Matt was asked about the best time he could remember. The three way conversation went like this:
Matt:
Yeah. Best time I'd have to say was living in me old house and we had no food and were broke.

Interviewer:
This was the best time?

Matt:
This is the best time that I've been to school. We come to school and we had cookin for half the day. That had to have been the best class, the best meal I've had.

Alison:
Cooked a roast.

Matt:
Yeah. Cooked a roast at school.

Interviewer:
And you were actually in a house with no food at all?

Matt:
Yeah. And spoke to Rebecca and she helped out with a bit of money and fixed things up. And yeah recommended us to a few places. Fixed a few things.

The social benefits extend well beyond the memorable meal, as Matt explained.
Well my girlfriend actually comes up here at lunch times and when she has got breaks and that sort of stuff. And she comes in: she's quite welcome in the classes if she's quiet. And she thinks it's such a change from going to a classroom where you've got to be very strict.

... (Here) you can duck out and go make a coffee and come back and catch up on whatever you missed out on. ... She thinks it's a dramatic change. It's more of an 'adult' sort of school instead of children being told what to do.

Matt illustrated the different, trusting community he now felt part of.
You don't have to really watch yourself or anything. With trust you can put your wallet down on the table and not really worry about it. You can speak to any of the teachers about any of your problems and that's as far as it goes. Very confidential. The only thing they'll do is help you. ...

Well my life's back on track now compared to what is was. Like I've gone from living in a dump of a house and not doing anything with me life but drink, no girlfriend nothing, like that. To having my own flat, very healthy, confident, having my own girlfriend and not drinking.

Matt described it as a 'very big transformation and not only that but I get an education for it'. In contrast to his previous experience of what he called a 'normal school'. 'Like that's me being out of home since I was 12 or 13. And, all the schools that I've gone to, not one of them have found me a house'. Asked to briefly explain why he left home at age 12, Matt continued.
Well it wasn't an option. The house was burnt down. So there was no house to go home to. And my mum went [interstate] and my father lived in [another town]. So I found, just started living with friends and yeah, staying around.

Alison's wellbeing

Alison had a different story. She had '...just finished a six months CGEA[5] course over at TAFE. And I had nothin else to do and I'd just get bored sitting at home. So [I] come up here and enrol...' The CGEA was 'so I can get a Year 10 pass...There was too many people at school. And I just don't like being in a big class'. Asked to explain in what ways her life had changed as a result of what she'd done at Future Connections, Alison continued.
Stayed out of trouble with the police ... Well when I like started up here I had to go to court. And Rebecca come to court with me and that. Like they were going to put me on probation but because I had Rebecca there and she got up and spoke for me and that, and said what I was doing. I just got time off, good behaviour bond. Which I'm off now so.

The conviction for theft is in the past.
I haven't been in trouble for 12 months so. I just get along with my sisters a bit better now than what I used to. Used to be punch-ons every day. ... I want to go to [the regional secondary college] next year and do Year 11. And then hopefully do something to do with hospitality or childcare.

Luke and Brad's wellbeing

Luke talked about studying at Future Directions in a joint interview with Brad.
We do enterprises with RAD. We did a cooking enterprise, a restaurant. And we made 80 dollars profit. So but we had to all plan it out and do all different things with it. Pay for all the food we bought.

Luke's 'best' time was being part of an activity team.
We have activities on Thursday afternoons. And that's just unreal, we play hockey, rollerblade hockey. We've got our own team and just it's the best thing cause when we first started no one know how to rollerblade and we, we're quite on top of it now.

Luke also outlined what he felt he was getting out of being at Future Connections.
You learn a lot, you just, can get work and get houses, you can get virtually anything you want out of here. They help you look for jobs. They help you if you're got problems. ... But the only way they will help you is if you actually do something for them. So if you're doing the courses you've got to stay in the courses. And that's probably the best thing.

Luke confided how he was in trouble with the police a lot when he was younger. 'When I was, say fourteen, yeah last year', Brad elaborated. 'Burgs and doing over taxis just to get money for drugs and shit. The Vice-Principal [of a local secondary college] told me about [Future Connections] so I came here'. Brad explained that he was now doing the Year 10 course, with the intention of being a mechanic. 'Well I have been keeping out of trouble for a while. Cut down smokin; pot that is, not cigarettes. And I'm learning heaps more than what I used to'.

Brad also identified his 'best time' in the program as the activity sessions. 'Activity, you know, cause I get along with everybody then and we work as a team all the time. It's really the best time'. When asked 'What do you say to people when they say, "What are you getting out of this place?"' Brad replied:
I tell them it's lots different to school and that. Because they do help you out a lot more, so you have an extra set of parents looking after you all the time. Anything's wrong, they'll always be there for you.

I like this place. I reckon it's unreal. It's like no one's getting hassled any more. Like one of our friends ... that used to go to [a local Secondary College]. I used to pick on him all the time. Now he's one of my best mates: everyone gets along really well here so, just no fights, everyone gets on real good.

When asked what life would be like without Future Connections, Brad said 'I'd probably be in Malmsbury [Youth Training Centre] right now'. Asked to elaborate, Brad added:
I used to do burglaries and that flat out and now I've been coming here sort of like another school, keeping me out of trouble, something that I like, enjoy doing and that...I don't even really think about doing (burglaries). I just think about doing my work and that.

Rebecca's perspective on wellbeing and trust

Rebecca is the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) worker. The young people mentioned her often as someone they trust and look to for support and practical help.

In 1998 JPET worked with 80 young Bendigo people: around a third were homeless, the rest were at risk of it. Rebecca came into contact with them primarily

through networks and referrals from Centrelink, community agencies and schools. Under the 'new youth activity agreements', youth support recipients must be 'doing something'. Rebecca's role is:

... to assist in overcoming any issue that stopped them accessing training, education, employment ... some of it's done around housing, some of it's done around drug and alcohol substance misuse, some of it's training, resumes, job search and some of it's just personal counselling. [Future Connections]... actually provides a spot for young people who no-one else wants to deal with, to come and get some training, some help and some support and get them back into mainstream life. So it's a very rare place that provides that change for them.

Rebecca had a view about why so many young people's wellbeing was at risk:

It's got a lot I think to do with the education system. The fact the class sizes are so large, and there's not so much one-to-one attention to young people. Yeah. I think that would have a lot to do with it.

Why do young people feel connected to the community at Future Connections?

The fact that we actually don't treat the young people like they're outcasts. They're treated like they're normal adults ... We respect them and we don't see their acting behaviour as themselves: it's their behaviour.

... [Future Connections] gives them the confidence. Here they're got a real 'safety net' feeling. The place is comfortable for them, it's welcoming, it's really friendly. And they feel that they can push themselves beyond those boundaries a little bit. It gives them the confidence to be able to work and get some work done here and also take that home and feel better about themselves. So it's a total wellbeing, you know, a lot of confidence boosting, a lot of self-esteem.

Asked to give some examples she spoke about the importance of what lies 'underneath' outcomes in education and training: in effect young people's wellbeing.

On that 'underneath' you've got health as an issue, recreation, they go out and do a lot of outdoor activities. In every program we've got a bit of that built in. But from my point of view we've got a young person in there doing training and education. ... but they've got other stuff going on, they can do their training while working on other issues in a safe environment.

Rebecca also spoke about the underpinning role of trust.

A lot of the young people we have here, have learnt in their lives not to trust adults or any other young people. It's just how they've been brought up. ... So the main, the first thing we have to do with the young people here is to gain their trust and gain their respect.

Rebecca emphasised that if nothing was done, when they are adults:

they're not going to trust anyone, they're going to have no self-esteem. They're going to be on the dole for the rest of their lives.

When Future Directions was a Skillshare older age groups studied there as well so Rebecca was asked on what basis they now justify their 'youth only' focus. Her answer sheds light on the importance of acknowledging youth norms.

It's a youth area. If you bring in adults, you're mixing the two different groups again. And you've got a total different scenario than what you have just with youth. What works for us really well, is that we're just for young people. So they really respect the place and enjoy it and feel like they can be young people down here.

Finally, Rebecca identified many other outcomes for students at Future Connections - wellbeing including increased self-esteem and self-confidence; better personal appearance and hygiene; decreased drug and alcohol use; and:

'reunification with the family - going back and living at home with them, or even just talking to their parents. It stabilises a young person, stabilises the family and it brings back that whole community and family wellbeing'. It's the little outcomes that we look for. It's not the huge ones. Employment is a big one. That is the major outcome. But also things like leisure. Taking them out doing activities, that's a self-confidence thing. That's a team building activity. And that's also reunifying them and showing them how to act in the community. A lot of these young people don't know that. And they've never actually been shown how to act with their peer and with adults in the community. So we take them out in a group and lead by example.

Role modelling of norms by staff was an important success factor.

You've got to show them. And that's part of the trust thing. If you say one thing and do something else they're not going to believe you, they're not going to trust you. And, even things like personal safety. I mean just to be able to see someone sort out a conflict them-

selves is a big outcome. A lot of these young people will use violence to sort out conflict. If we can actually show there is another means of sorting out some sort of conflict, it's great.

Standing back ...

Future Connections is dealing exceptionally well with a phenomenon that is unexceptional. Australian teenagers drop out of school at a rate almost double that of other OECD countries.[6] Thirty five per cent of Australia's 16–19-year-olds are not enrolled in school, compared with the OECD average of 20 per cent. OECD argues that education systems have to:

... be more responsive to the needs of youths whose family background, schooling and communities did not equip them with the skills, qualifications, attitudes or motivation for the labour market.[7]

On a number of indicators of wellbeing, the young people interviewed were clearly at risk when they came to Future Connections. Long-term trends show youth unemployment rising ever upwards since the 1970s. The wellbeing of early school leavers such as Matt, Brad, Luke and Allison is deteriorating at an accelerating rate in relation to other groups in society.[8] 'Marginal' young people not in education or full-time work are extremely disadvantaged. 'The over-representation of young people from families with lower socio-economic status in the marginalised group raises the probability of the perpetuation of inter-generational inequality'.[9]

The effect of marginalisation on indicators of social capital is likely to be large. The work of Future Directions and Robinvale LAECG shows that marginalised youth in regional and isolated communities must learn trust in their communities. Loss of trust in their families, peers and the education system is disastrous. Exclusion from family, mainstream education and the world of paid work alienates them from community values and norms.

They respond to their marginalisation, alienation and abuse with angry, anti-social, offensive and even criminal behaviours at home, school and in the wider community. Many instances of inappropriate classroom behaviour, as the *Young and ACE* report[10] suggests, disguise deficiencies, such as a lack of basic literacy. Future Connections staff, like the staff at Robinvale LAECG, consciously and intentionally model norms and learning principles that transfer to – and transform – a growing number of young people in ACE contexts[11] and which are very different to the norms and educational practices of many schools. They include targeted but open access, flexible and personalised curriculum, emphasis on the whole person, building trusting relationships, understanding the impact of educational failure and loss of self-esteem, negotiating norms (in these organisations called 'codes of conduct') and seeing staff as facilitators rather than 'teachers' or disciplinarians.

The extension of ACE's student centred approach to include young people in ACE is relatively new. An ACFE Board funded action research project[12] in 1996 identified a role for 'the ACE sector in providing entry points for lifelong education and skills acquisition where VCE or TAFE programs may not be immediately relevant'.[13] Among the issues identified by that research was that:

Significant numbers of young people leave school early, become unemployed and do not access existing alternative education pathways ... With recent changes in federal government policies, such as restrictions to unemployment benefits for young people and a decline in school retention rates at Year 12, it seems likely that the numbers of young people looking for alternative pathways will increase.[14]

Having said that, it is important to stress that the value of ACFE Board funding for Future Connections is maximised by the way Future Directions uses networks and gets access to other funding sources. Future Directions collaborates with other agencies, schools, families, the justice system and welfare providers. Referrals from Centrelink bring additional State funds in the form of 'TAFE youth vouchers' with them. Synergies between agencies, programs and education organisations make collaboration rather than competition both strategic and profitable.

Early school leaving, youth homelessness and the attendant social problems, including child abuse and family violence are part of the social reality in regional Australia. There is a significant ($p<0.01$) correlation in Victoria between early school leaving before 15 years and low income, unskilled work, unemployment, child injuries and defendants appearing before courts.[15] Globalisation, industry restructuring and 'downsizing' of government services,[16] have led to loss of jobs in a wide range of industries in and around Bendigo. Pockets

of high unemployment and disadvantage exist within Bendigo, particularly in the goldfields annulus 50–100 km around Bendigo,[17] where housing is cheap but where there are few jobs.

The social capital inherent in young people is unequally distributed, and the inequality is self-perpetuating. 'New rural residents' who are 'less mobile, less healthy and less wealthy' escape the city after being displaced by lack of affordable accommodation in the metropolitan area.[18] At critical times young people and families at risk are often deprived of the networks and trust they need from extended family, schools, government and community support services.

Future Connections is one of a growing number of community owned and managed educational organisations in regional Victoria 'who are not waiting for the cavalry to arrive from Canberra or the capital city'[19] They intervene and tap into state ACFE Board and/or other State Training System funds and include young people in ACE.

From a social capital perspective, the networking undertaken by the provider on behalf of the Centrelink 'client' is a critical part of the solution. From a family or young person's perspective the '... perplexing web of social service agencies, at the federal, state and local level which act incongruently and operate using individual budgets, objectives, service guidelines and rules and eligibility requirements'[20] is part of the problem. It is not that the networks do not exist. Rather it is that they exist in a confusing form, out of reach of the people who most need to access them.

The networking and active role modelling undertaken by Future Connections staff welds links to school and family networks, and to sources of possible assistance. 'Success' is not just defined as paid work or course completion, but also as the re-establishment of lost networks and the trust that comes with them.

1 See Map 3 in the Appendix.
2 Seeking but not in paid work, aged between 15 to 24 years, 1996 census, City of Greater Bendigo, mapped as a proportion of the total 15-24 cohort.
3 See Map 3 in the Appendix.
4 VCE: Victorian Certificate of Education.
5 CGAE: Certificate in General Adult Education.
6 *Preparing youth for the 21st Century*, OECD, Paris (1997 statistics).
7 Cited in *The Age*, 25 October 1999, p. 5.
8 *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney, 1998, p. 11.
9 McClelland, A. McDonald H. & McDonald, F. 'Young people and labour market disadvantage: the situation of young people not in education or full time work', in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*, op. cit., p.103.
10 Young and ACE: Young unemployed people in Adult and Community Education, Report for ACFE Board by Gippsland and Northern Metropolitan Regional Councils of ACFE, undated.
11 Young and ACE, ibid.
12 Young and ACE, ibid.
13 Victorian Government Tertiary Education and Training Policy, 1996, p.29, Table 9.
14 *Young and ACE*, op. cit.
15 Vinson, T. 1999, Unequal in Life, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond, p.31.
16 Fincher, R. & Nieuwenhuysen, J. 1998, Australian Poverty: Then and now, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
17 Vinson 1999, op. cit., p. 31.
18 Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen (1998), op. cit., p. 159.
19 'Demographic and social changes in Australia', A. Wahlquist, Keynote Presentation to Regional Australia Summit, Canberra, October 1999.
20 Comprehensive collaborative services, Chicago http://www.unc.edu/depts/ssw/ntap/ffrcollab.htm

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SIX

Wellbeing of Koorie Elders:

Aboriginal Oral History Project
Aboriginal Community Elders Services
BrunswickConsultative Group

39

Aboriginal Community Elders Services in Brunswick promotes the wellbeing of prematurely ageing Koorie Elders who have limited formal education but extensive cultural knowledge. The Oral History Project is a story about identity, culture, trust and pride. Respect for community knowledge and sharing of history opens the door to recognition, reconciliation, and Koorie resistance to non-Indigenous cultural domination. The endorsement, and persistence, of Aboriginal culture builds social capital.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

We're looking at literacy – writing or speaking – as a form of [illegible] about power over what has happened to you and changing your status from [illegible]

– Project Worker)

Aboriginal Community Elders Services

In this portrait we see how a Koorie Oral History Project at the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES), promotes individual wellbeing. We see the Oral History Project making social capital, by sharing Koorie knowledge and history and strengthening identity and trust in a spirit of reciprocity between Aboriginal Elders and the wider community.

The Oral History Project challenges the broader ACE sector to address education issues associated with the wellbeing of an ageing Australian population.[1] A well-founded hypothesis asserts that continued and active engagement in mentally stimulating learning works against poor physical and psychological health conditions.[2]

The Aboriginal Community Elders Services is tucked away in inner suburban Melbourne.[3] A modest street sign, 'ACES', points the way into this 20 year old residential, aged and day care facility for Aboriginal Elders. Social mapping data[4] explains why ACES is in Brunswick. A high proportion of Melbourne's Koorie population lives in the wedge of suburbs immediately north of the CBD.[5]

Why do Koorie Elders age so young? Fay Carter, the program manager explained, 'Different adverse lifestyles' have...damaged their bodies and they become frail, old people before their time'. Being younger than many other people in similar physical circumstances, Koorie Elders fall through the gap because they can't get access to programs and services set up for people aged 65 onwards.[6] ACES services are for Koorie Elders aged over 50.

Being old bestows status in Indigenous society. While Koories, usually referred to as 'Elders', are highly respected,[7] becoming old is problematic. The average age expectancy of Indigenous people in 1999 was only around half the age of other Australians (approximately 43 years).

Painting the [illegible]

The ACES adult day care program and the Oral History Project belong to a community setting where Koorie social activity and cultural practice extend far beyond the boundaries of those two programs.

The Aboriginal Oral History Project is integrated within the four-day, day care program of Games, Arts and Crafts, Health and Outings. Kate Harvey, the Aboriginal Oral History Project worker, explained that the Oral History Project was established:

...to assist the Elders to record stories, oral histories ... to assist them to do further research to fill in gaps in areas of interest or knowledge... One of the big issues has been that whole thing around the politics of representation: how much can you tell whitefellas to raise their awareness without overstepping the line and either getting them sulky about white guilt or reinforcing stereotypes? So that's been a big part of it. The Elders here have a great deal of knowledge and are usually highly skilled storytellers and historians, but their cultural style isn't given credibility in mainstream ways.

Kate outlined her role in the program:

...to make it a cross-cultural thing so that the value of Elders' knowledge is made accessible, not only to future Aboriginal generations, but so that the rest of the community can also benefit from their very considerable knowledge.

What began as a simple 'story telling and recording' exercise expanded and evolved in its scope and its outcomes, and was only made possible through trusting relationships:

It started out being a record for the Aboriginal community and it broadened into 'Let's try and make an educational resource', which made the project about 15 times more difficult. There's a concern that it be able to be used in a way that aids reconciliation so that it's sharing stories, it's sharing knowledge. It's hoping to improve understanding and it's taking some new steps in terms of trusting. Aboriginal people are beginning to talk about painful things that they wouldn't have shared with a white public before.

The trust necessary to begin to share stories and knowledge is embedded in the aims of the day care program, where physical and social wellbeing are cultivated. The weekly health day and the healthy daily lunch care for physical needs. Around 40 per cent of Aboriginal people over 50 years of age who live in Australian capital cities self-assess their health status as either fair or poor, and around 30 per cent worry or sometimes worry about going without food.[8]

Fay, the centre's manager, emphasised that ACES monitors other aspects of physical wellbeing - such as whether the Elders are eating well at home, taking medication, getting health check-ups or getting respite care - in a holistic way:

Now that means everything. That means proper housing, their health, it means education, it means all these things put together. And not just for themselves because the whole family has to be well for any part of that family to be well. You can't just target in on a little bit of that family, you can't just fix one part of it. That's what we find really difficult to deal with: the way mainstream[9] operates.

The Elders did not want to disclose (yet again) their stories in interviews for the purposes of this anthology. Much of this account comes from Fay, Kate and Reg (the day care program co-ordinator). Reliance on quotes from Kate in the latter part of the portrait is consistent with her trusted role as project facilitator and worker since the inception of the Oral History Project.

Trust [illegible] cultural knowledge

Reg Blow develops programs that stimulate participants mentally, physically and spiritually. He identified Indigenous values underpinning these programs.

'We always seem to be trying to follow a European model and that's where things sort of stuff up ... We learn by doing, and we learn by group participation'.

Reg outlined the 'spiritual journey of self discovery' which forms the basis of the ACES day care program, particularly through the arts and crafts program:

[We] try to develop our own concepts of our own identity ... We're sort of moving through a pathway of gathering cultural information and experiences that personally empowers us. This elevates our position in our own ranks in the community or family clan group that we belong to, and then we have that information that we can pass down within our group.

He talks of sharing and networking well beyond the learning group and the local Koorie community. Reg recollected a recent Tasmanian visit he made with other Elders:

By them sharing with us and us sharing with them, we both are enriched in the encounter and that's what this journey is all about ... it sort of reinforces your own sense of worth and identity and that's the self discovery bit.

Some methods used are specific to the circumstances of Koorie Elders.

We've developed ACES to look at our own special needs. ... We die 20 years younger. We never get a chance to live the 'good retirement', if you like. ... So we look at prematurely aged people as our client group, disabled Aboriginal people and of course frail aged people.

Reg explained that many Elders lost their Aboriginal cultural identity through cultural genocide, assimilation and integration:

So we've been, if you like, institutionalised for quite some time. ... What we're doing now is in a sense, cultural revival programs, trying to find snippets of information that identify us as who we are. ...

[Elders] want cultural knowledge. They want to be able to occupy themselves in a productive way. That gives them a feeling of self-worth, so they come in here on a

voluntary basis, they do things, make things. ... Independence is the key to it all. We try to maintain them in their own home.

Asked to elaborate, Reg said:
Empowerment is knowing a bit more about your culture. See as urban Aboriginal people, it's a bit difficult for us to express ourselves culturally. In recovering from past government policies some of us need to learn more about Aboriginal culture. We've got to be able to express ourselves Aboriginally if you like...

We need to do this, to in some ways, be acceptable. That's part of our problem—lack of acceptance in the white community. Racism occurs on a daily basis for some people. So we're trying to be accepted, but we're still trying to maintain our own identity because we are Aboriginal people. We're special in that sense. We are the original people of this country.

Each day, in Reg's words, 'Someone will grab the ball and run with it. ...That sort of enhances the people's information. ...They are well fed and the physical environment is catered for'.

Fay expanded on the benefits of group learning, opportunities in the day care program and the Oral History Project:
It's been building up their self-esteem, their confidence... I think it's just having the confidence that they can be equal, even in conversing... It's also making them aware that they're not too old to change their lifestyles and to be involved in learning programs.

Asked to expand on outcomes of ACES programs for the Koorie community more generally, or for families or extended families, she continued:
The mainstream education system has broken down the link between older Aboriginal people and younger Aboriginal people...The younger generation goes to a mainstream school now and they learn all these different things that the older Aboriginal person hasn't learnt...They're sort of growing up thinking that the older Aboriginal person hasn't been educated. I think down the track this [program] might sort of bridge that gap.

Trust in the funding body

Fay told a story about trust we heard nowhere else.
What I thought was really good was when we were able to get ACFE to acknowledge the copyright over the oral history stories. It was an achievement ... that other people will benefit by in other areas.'

Kate told the same story about earning and developing trust in the oral history taping process:
It's been an enormous issue. One of the problems with [the program] was that it was funded for three months part time and you could have spent all of your time simply establishing trust.... We did a lot of talking about copyright and cultural ownership and all of that.

Trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

Kate explained why cross-cultural trust is such a critical issue:
For two centuries whitefellas have demonstrated very clearly that they are quite untrustworthy. When you start talking about history you start talking about all the things that white people have little guilt tantrums about and have been very, very effective in censoring.... The issue of trust is the issue of trying to tell the truth and get around the censors, and also not upset them so much so that they don't fund you again, so it's a very tricky little bit of work.

Culture and Identity

In the language of social capital, identity resources are important to communities. In Koorie contexts, culture equates to identity and survival, and is highly valued. Kate explained how the Oral History Project incorporated and endorsed culture:
This is a place where Elders gather. It is a place where cultural knowledge is held. The Elders are the keepers of Aboriginal knowledge. They're the cultural custodians, and because we live in a community that still says, by and large, Victorian Aboriginal people and culture no longer exist then this is a very important site to change that perception. In the Yorta Yorta judgment in 1998, we were told that the tide of history had washed away the Yorta Yorta people's culture and rights to land permanently... If you can be told that the genocide was so successful that you have no rights because you have no culture, then demonstrating your culture becomes necessary to securing basic human rights.

Cultural custodianship has been an extraordinarily difficult and important role since the invasion. It has always gone on: it's gone on in very altered forms and often in

even stronger forms than what it did prior to the invasion. And it has incorporated traditions of resilience and resistance and incredible courage and underground tactics and all sorts of things, and none of that has ever been given recognition or respect. And so in looking at that whole issue of cultural custodianship, there is a very big story. It is not about teaching kids how to make boomerangs: it's a hell of a lot bigger than that.

It's wanting to document and have respect and recognition given to Koorie knowledge. One of the aims of reconciliation is respect for Indigenous cultures, and one can't respect a culture unless one respects its knowledge base.

Healing through stories

Kate talked about how story telling heals the teller. One storyteller aged 89:
Walks around with his chapter in his pocket and he shows everyone. His body language has changed and he is so proud. He walks around saying, 'Well there's no f.... lies in it at all', and he tells everyone, all around. Everywhere I go, people say, 'Oh, we've heard about the Oral History program through Uncle [name]'. His pride in the importance of his memories has just blossomed.

Auntie [name] is another very good storyteller. She grew up from the age of 12 months living on the back of a cart with her grandmother, running from the welfare. So she's got a very interesting story... also a very painful story. She wants to do her autobiography ... she's worked on her memories and her recollections a lot and her daughters have all been involved in that too.

Kate recounted how the stories heal Indigenous listeners too, with overtones of the community-building process in Robinvale. The wider aim of the Robinvale program is to encourage feelings of pride in young Aboriginal people:
It's really important for Koorie students in school where too often they still are told they're shit... Koorie students face a terrible undermining of their pride and identity at school. They can only read in the curriculum about Aboriginal people from 200 years ago or Aboriginal people from the north. We want to include Aboriginal people from here who are local heroes.

We're hoping to create a Koorie presence in the classroom not only to support Aboriginal students against the attacks to their integrity, but to give them pride and to let other kids know what they're talking about when they talk about their pride. My daughter still comes home saying the kids at school say 'We're really surprised you're not drunk because every Black we've seen is drunk'. So the average high school student still doesn't know that there is a whole life beyond those narrow stereotypes. Putting these stories in the curriculum will hopefully make it real that Indigenous culture is alive and strong in Victoria. The people might be fairer skinned and they might drive Holdens, but they still share and they still believe in their culture and they still have a very strong Indigenous identity.

Kate explained that published oral histories about people living in Melbourne will mean that 'everyone knows' and can say:
'I know that person and I'm proud of them', and 'I'm a part of that pride'. It's important to Aboriginalise the curriculum with Aboriginal voices, not with white voices saying 'They're very nice people but...'.

The challenges of accurately representing Koorie elders in text are enormous. Kate said,

My tools are italics, bold and an exclamation mark and with that I'm supposed to represent the full range of [Elders'] cultural style, which is utterly impossible'.

Kate linked the Oral History Project to Reg's concept of a spiritual journey:
Elders are coming to the end of this part of their journey. The rest of their spiritual journey goes on elsewhere. This is the end of their part on earth and all of their lives have included far too much suffering. So the baggage they carry at the end can be a whole lot of awful things, and some healing needs to take place at this point for them to make the next-step with some peace...so that instead of saying, 'They locked me up and abused me because I was awful', you can say, 'They locked me up and abused me because they were awful'. In terms of benefits to people this can be very powerful and happen quite quickly and flow on.

Many stories are painful and not usually associated with pride. Many dig up deliberate abrogation of trust:
We talk about issues like sexual abuse. We talk about rape, as a method of genocide. We talk about government breeding programs' and therefore why some people are too pale to have their Aboriginality fully recognised and a whole lot of things that have caused not only pain but terrible shame. Shame has been used as a weapon against Aboriginal people and it's a very effective weapon.

So rewriting, re-understanding your own life can be a very healing thing, and people then pass that on. The children and grandchildren of the people doing the stories are very proud because their family member is going to be in a book. ... It means recognition of their knowledge, their experience, their authenticity of Aboriginality, their understanding. Their analysis of race relations of course is very good, but it's (usually) considered to be either ignorant or a pack of lies. So many Aboriginal people have lived their lives in an environment that tells them that they're stupid and they tell lies, because their reality doesn't meet the official white reality. All of that is extraordinarily mentally undermining. It's both subtle and not subtle, but it's a 24-hour experience in many ways. One of the things that we say, and this is empowering and healing, is, 'I'm really interested in your life and I'm interested in what happened to you and I'm really interested in how you analyse that'. We go from description to analysis. 'Don't tell me everything about what they did to abuse you. Let's think about why they did that'.

Kate was asked what she would say to an outsider to justify expenditure of public funds on Koorie oral history:
When we talk about history or culture or contemporary issues, as a modern, progressive, egalitarian and multicultural society, we of course want to make sure that everyone is included. Aboriginal people have very interesting stories to tell that unfortunately most white people have not been allowed to hear...The sharing of Elders' knowledge is a very important part of building bridges between cultures and it has flow-on benefits way beyond black white relations. It benefits people to learn to respect differences, whether they be cultural differences or gender preference differences or whatever.

All the things that Aboriginal culture talks about things that any culture can benefit from. Sharing, looking out for each other, being generous, having a sense of humour, criticising and then forgiving the next day...And so we're looking at sharing what Aboriginal people have to give.

The Oral History Program also reinforces the important role of Elders in communities which support healthy family structures, and all sorts of things.

O[illegible]sky
Dus[illegible]

Kate says it can be dangerous expecting people to 'deal with the pain that's dug up doing the oral histories':
I go in there... People have had memories of the most horrific abuse and horrific things that have happened that just leave me in shock and I don't know what to say to them....

We're talking about people who have suffered incredible mental torture in institutions and in life. Sometimes we're talking about people who were refugees of a war in effect.

Story telling like this, has serious implications for the ongoing wellbeing of Elders:
I go in and say, 'Tell me a story', and then I say, 'Thanks darling, see you next week, I'll give you a draft' ... There should be more support going on, but there's not ... None of that gets done properly and in a way there is no end to it.

We're talking about people who have got weak hearts and bad blood pressure and who are often ready to die...Auntie [name] died not long after she told her story and I felt really happy that she had told it, because she had been wanting to write a book for a long, long time. I felt some comfort to know that we'd recorded it and that her story will live on beyond her. It was a great wish of hers. It was a great dream and it was achieved, so that was a good thing. But yeah, it's like you feel sometimes you could set off a nervous breakdown...

...The material there in terms of people's suffering is extraordinary and that's an intrinsic part of it. And the death rate: every day when I come in I check the flag and as often as not it's at half mast. As Reg comments 'Aboriginal people don't have retirement, they work like dogs and then die'. We're trying to give them some retirement. Day care is supposed to be a pleasurable enjoyable leisure time activity, and I come in and say, 'Tell me about the concentration camp you grew up in...' So we're walking through a minefield, and it's both healing and painful. ...

One of the story tellers, Gwen Garoni, explained some of the healing tied up in pride over doing things she had never done before:
I was just sitting at home before I become involved here

at ACES and I love it. You know I love the people and everything else that goes with it. ... I've wrote my story for a book that we are doing that's still being drafted ... Once you start looking into it you get really involved, and you get really proud to think that you've been part of all this sort of thing. ... It's made me change quite a bit. ... I've got 14 grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. They're all proud about being Aboriginal.

I'd like to think it does help a lot of people here, especially the older ones, but also the younger ones. ... It brings everybody together. They're all such a happy bunch and community. They talk over all their problems with one another and try to help one another. They respect their Elders here.

A lot of our members that come and participate in day care have all been very sick. ... By getting them to come in here at least they can forget about their troubles for just a while and they're not alone. Where if they are sitting at home, they seem to get sicker and go down faster. But being here, all together mixing with everybody else, I think it makes a big difference. I know it has to me anyway. ... There's always someone just a little bit worse off than what you are.

Standing back

The Oral History project proves that education and learning generate and sustain individual, family and community wellbeing. Trust, wellbeing, identity resources (*culture*) and reciprocity are aims, drivers, and outcomes, of the day care program and oral history.

Beyond Cinderella argues that learning has intrinsic rewards since older learners enjoy greater control over their health, financial affairs and wellbeing.[10] Beyond Cinderella claims that '[the] different basis of the learning needs of Aboriginal adults compared to the profile of many ACE participants extends to the goals that Aboriginal adults attach to education'.[11] In the ACES case, Koories aspire to be cultural custodians and role models for the next generation.

Trust and confidentiality underpin interaction between the project worker and the Elders. But in the sequence of private story telling, careful editing, screening and public revelation, there is a real question about adequate follow-up and support for the Elders. There are also concerns about whether this program, used in other contexts *without similar trust and cultural respect*, will fully safeguard the wellbeing of participants.

The day care program works not only because it exemplifies self-determination and Koorie sociability. The program is supported more broadly inside and outside ACES. The Oral History Program relies on skill, expertise, energy and time well beyond what is paid for by government funds.

Indigenous participation in mainstream and other forms of education is low in proportion to their presence in the general population. As a good and positive story of ACE in a very special Indigenous context, the Oral History Project signposts a better future for Koorie education in Victoria.

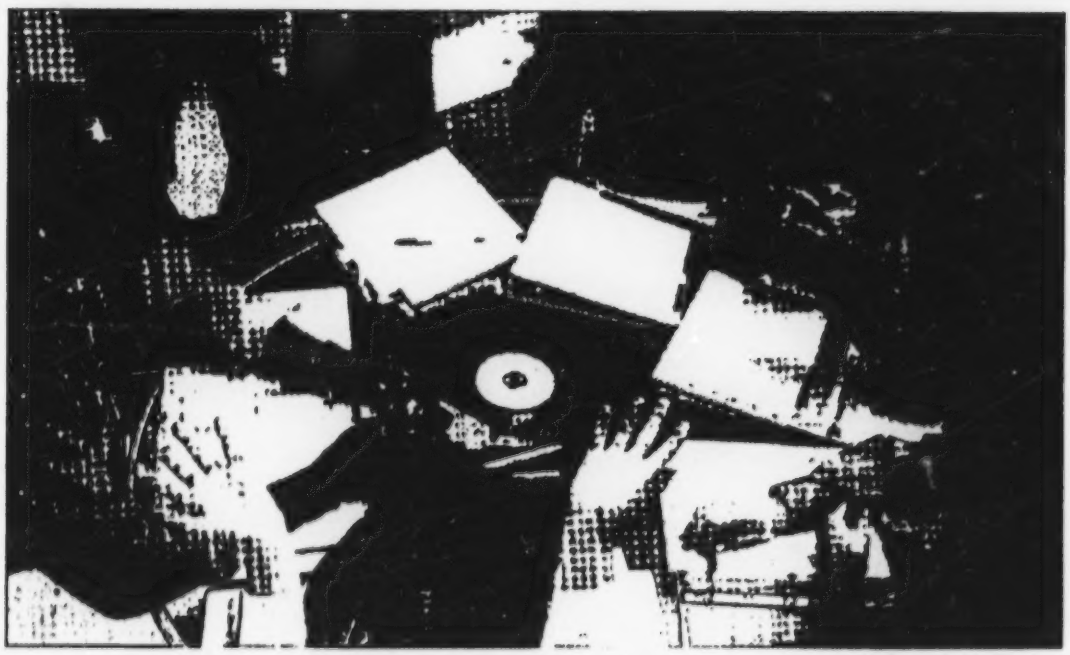
1 ACFE Board 1998, *Taking ACE to the Year 2000: a vision*, Melbourne; comprehensively discussed in *Beyond Cinderella: towards a learning society*, Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1997, pp. 105–112; also noted in *A bridge to the future, Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998-2003*, ANTA, Brisbane, 1998, p. 1.
2 *Lifelong learning: the third age* 1995, Australian Association for Adult and Community Education (AAACE) and Australian National Training Authority, p. 4.
3 See Map 4 in the Appendix.
4 See Map 4 in the Appendix.
5 CBD: Central Business District of Melbourne, 6km away.
6 An Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998 *Causes of death report* (1999) confirmed that Aboriginal people nationally have a death rate three times higher than the total population, and on average die nearly three decades earlier than other Australians: cited in *The Age*, 30 November 1999.
7 84% of Indigenous Australians aged over 13 in the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994, Table 1, p. 5) agreed that the role of elders is important: ranging from around 70% agreement in some capital cities to over 95% agreement in some isolated communities.
8 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey*, op. cit., Tables 14 and 17.
9 The term 'mainstream' is used here with reference to non-Indigenous contexts.
10 *Beyond Cinderella*, op. cit., p. 109.
11 ibid, p. 51.
12 ibid, p. 52.

SEVEN

I give back:

Bonds, bridges and reciprocity

Cheltenham Neighbourhood House



Cheltenham Neighbourhood House, newly transformed itself, pursues the transformation of students through literacy and computer programs, and the work of volunteers in 'Literacy for Living', a program for students with a mild intellectual disability. With an integrated approach to community development and lifelong learning the House shows how working *with* the community fuels cooperation, collaboration and respect *in* the community. This portrait describes the transformation of two students who became teachers. Their experience of belonging is the well spring of their desire to 'give back'—to reciprocate.

Of course, if I did not belong—feel this is part of my life, never would I give back.

(Migrant participant and volunteer tutor)

Cheltenham Neighbourhood House

A photo of Cara's English as a Second Language class has ten ethnic groups among the sixteen people pictured there. Cheltenham is a mixed socio-demographic district[1]. There are factories and warehouses close to typical residential streets and an arterial road - the Nepean Highway - cuts through the district.

Cheltenham Neighbourhood House is next to a church complex in a quiet cul-de-sac one street back from streams of traffic pouring along Nepean Highway. The church and House share many facilities and the House has a church representative on it without compromising any independence. The House runs several education programs, including Literacy for Living, English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), computer courses, childcare, fitness and wellbeing. Each of the staff has an overview of the whole operation, and the busy coordinator maintains core activities. From a narrower set of activities two years ago, the House is transformed into a vibrant centre with new programs and initiatives in response to identified local needs.

Transforming education

This portrait shows how a sense of belonging and a change in identity result in reciprocity—people wanting to give back – and is only one story amongst many that could be told from the impact of this typical Neighbourhood House. The transformation of two migrant women, welcomed to the House as students, and who are now tutors, is a process that gives rise to a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging bears fruit in their desire to 'give back'— to reciprocate. The formation of bonding ties usually expands to external networks through bridging ties. Successful settlement processes for migrants generate processes of reciprocity. They make the most of human and social resources because the initial investment of time and funding yields social capital benefits, not only during the lifetimes of individuals affected, but in 'their children's children" as well.

The rejuvenation of Cheltenham Neighbourhood House

Margaret, the coordinator, Dora, a member of the Committee of Management of the House, and Cara, the teacher of ESL and literacy classes, talked about the 'amazing' transition that reinvigorated Cheltenham Neighbourhood House. Previously, there was a child-minding facility and a course or two. Now they offer a suite of programs including computer courses, a group of ESL and literacy courses (some for adult people with a disability) and a range of courses for leisure, health and wellbeing.

Dora went to the House after a long-term, debilitating illness and enrolled in ACE courses. She believes that study helped her to recuperate and saved her life. *'Feeling as if you belong, valued, is what got me on my feet again. It's the people who make the difference—Margaret, Cara—all of them.'*

Cara, the teacher who looks after the language, literacy and intellectually disabled people's courses, says that purposeful fostering of a 'sense of belonging' through building supportive networks is the element that makes the difference - as much for her, as for the students: *We very much have a support network going here. The*

thing that has made a difference working here...is that I feel I belong. Whereas before I was working at all different agencies and different organisations and I felt I was there but I was drifting. I didn't feel I had my feet firmly on the ground, whereas now I feel I'm very much at home in the community.

Cara talks about the ways this growing confidence, sense of belonging and changing identity shapes participants' learning outcomes:

They need to just sort of, you know, build their confidence. And what I'm finding is that they need to move onto different areas, and some of the lower level students are now getting their confidence to get involved in other areas in the Community House. So they're moving into the art and craft, whereas before they didn't have the confidence for that. They're moving into computers, which is really good to see. I get the feeling from my students that they really need to increase their confidence in using their language before they can go out to work.

It depends on the culture as well. In some cultures they don't like to make mistakes. So to actually get them to talk, you really have to draw everything out of them and to give them the confidence. It doesn't matter if you make a mistake, you've just got to open your mouth and start communicating. People understand. I just say to them that they are the ones here who are learning—they're doing all the work and they have to feel proud of themselves. When they do communicate, and if they do make a mistake, they are still able to get their ideas across with someone. And so we just practise, just to open their mouths to be able to talk, improves them. Obviously they are very keen to improve their pronunciation skills, and we do pay a lot of attention to that. But if they could just communicate first, then they will learn, they will start to improve on their pronunciation, their grammar areas. But it's not as important as just being able to start talking.

Lucretia's story

Lucretia's depth of understanding of reciprocity and trust are almost tangible. An engineer in Europe, she studied English for professionals when she arrived about 7 years ago, with the intention of fast-tracking back into her vocation. After a few years, Lucretia decided that fluent communication in English is more important than an initial quick fix to achieving long-term outcomes. She now works as a volunteer in the ESL classes at the Neighbourhood House almost full time. 'You want to give back because you feel part of it' she says. Her story shows give-and-take as a kind of leaven in our society. In the case of new settlers, the effect of reciprocity on the community and wider society is immense but not always transparent.

Here is Lucretia's story in her own words.

Before Australia

I was an engineer back in Azerbaijan. It was there I was born. You know, Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea? And I worked there for 30 years, yeah. I worked for the oil industry, as an engineer. Yes, and I was happy there, because I went on a lot of business trips. I went around the country, a lot of cities I saw, but it was no good! I was happy with job, I like it, but I got too busy. They pushed me for more, more, more. Salary—it was not so good! And then I come and make for me an easier life here in Australia!

Settling in

My sister is the only family member here. She has been here ten years and then I came after three years. I had support from my sister and then after two years I start to receive my own money and my life. After two years my life was not so bad and I choose to go to work and assimilate with people. And I choose this because I think I can do more if I assimilate with people and my English improves. So spending more time now getting better English means I can get more and better work later on.

When I first arrived, I study at an English language centre for six months. I did this English course and then I worked in the city council in Caulfield for one month. And do you know this was two years ago—not so perfect English, not enough time, and of course computers! I haven't got computer skills enough for this work. So I did a computer course in Footscray and Melbourne and then here in Cheltenham. Different methods, different people, different accents and I hear something new all the time.

Freedom is everything. It is free here. I can do this. I can go where I want.

Home base networks: Bonding ties

There's a big Russian community out here, especially in Caulfield and the same in Moorabbin. Even the Russian people say to me, 'Why you not with Russians?' I say, 'If I with Russians all the time I never know English.' Yeah, this is true.

The hardest thing when I first arrived in Australia was my English. Like you can't ask something. I was prepared to come here, to like a new country, a new life and I wanted to learn about customs and about people. But I couldn't. No communications! When I go to buy something, I need to ask my sister to go with me but she is busy sometimes.

Branching out networks: Bridging ties

Before, I couldn't speak in front of people—my heart bangs like this and I am pale, you know, I was so worried. Now I can say something. When I first came, I couldn't speak with them, I just look at them, not participate with them. I sit like this [slumps, withdrawn] at first, for the first two or three days. And then I slowly start to speak with them and, Oh! They understand me! I am happy, lucky; I have around good people.

I learn and learn and learn and maybe I crazy, but I want to learn more. But of course, trust is number one. Trust is for communication, of course. This is different country, different customs, different behaviour, different point of view, different all of this. Maybe I...I need to change. The first three, four years was very difficult. I try to speak with migrant people—we don't have a lot of words. And then I start to speak with English people and then a little bit, I watch, because of my work experience. First I need to prove what I am and then they start to trust me everywhere, yes.

...at Cheltenham Neighbourhood House

When I arrived in Australia in 1992 I lived in the East Bentleigh and I wanted to assimilate with Australians, to communicate with them a little bit. And first of all I went to Bentleigh Community Health Centre and they told me to come to this Centre because it is closer to my House. I started here in 1998 in March, so I've been at this Centre 2 years.

How I start to do this Living Skills program is because the teacher needed the help and I thought this is good for both of us. This is for me. I offer her help because there are 10 or 15 people and she can't do this thing alone—she needs help. It is very handy to be volunteer because I don' t know English well, and the elderly people—they want to speak. A lot of the people and I start to speak. I went to Salvation Army first, and I start to speak with them because they are lonely people and they want to speak.

Today I have been working here with the disabled group. They like me. I am so glad to be able to teach them. I work here 3 days each week—Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday classes. Tuesday all day. Then Thursday is with the old people. Yeah, 4 days. Almost full time. But I'm proud of myself because my English I think improves every week. I have goals, yes. I'll keep working here for years, because here I feel good, you know. People from different countries—and we are informal with the English and some problems we share here with each other.

This is like family, and I feel I need to do something in return. Now I can communicate with people and give something back here because I received a lot. I like to help the people that I know with my knowledge and my skills.

...and now I move out into the community...

We do things together outside classes. We know even where we live; we go to each other's places sometimes to visit. We are all involved in the fete that is coming up. We all went to a bowling club in Moorabbin and to the Rialto Tower where we go for a picnic in Cheltenham Park and in Cheltenham to the movies in the evening.

Getting together outside the classes is good—we know each other and we communicate with each other. We go to new places together. We go with family, with husbands and friends and children and, yeah, we take food with us. The class teacher is like our friend and she listens but we understand each other, with mistakes. Our teacher is teacher, we are students, but here we are all equal, yeah. We are relaxed, so being more relaxed is better for learning.

When we go out with the students, we talk about what happens in class because if we don't understand we ask each other. We talk about what happened with families. And of course, if we have problems we share because we are all like children, we help each other to survive. We all go with each other—it is like a family.

The future

I can't speak good, but I want to do something in the future. For a while English is my first goal, and then communications, and then the next step is driving. I learn now to drive car because this is new life for me. I try, I passed the 'L'! We'll see. It is important to set goals. Then you can achieve something that you want and then the next one. I want to, at my age, to teach something. I want to travel again like before, I like to travel. I think I have been twice to Canberra, I have been to Sydney. Now I go to cinemas, and the Philosophical Society in Russell Street. I start here because this is family for me.

We know each other from this Neighbourhood House, we do things together. Cara helped with me and I help with this place.

I wanted to give something back. This is in my brain. This is a responsibility. I feel like I am contributing something.

Modesta's story

Modesta, a migrant from Chile where she was a business executive, spent many years in 'settlement' mode establishing new networks before deciding to make Australia her permanent home. Her story illustrates some of the challenges overcome by new arrivals in the tentative and sensitive early years of settlement as they establish their new lives, first through bonding ties, then though bridges outwards into society.

Before Australia

In Chile, I work all my life. I work for about 33 years in a well-known company. I did a lot of jobs there. My last job there was like as a public relations officer. I was talking all day and visiting clients.

Settling in

In Australia I become a Housewife. And when I came here, first of all I want to live in the country area—this is in the Mornington Peninsula. It's a beautiful place near the beach. Fantastic place but, oh my God, I was so isolated. I started to be Housewife. The only English I knew was from school, and that was many, many, many years ago. And when I came here, I start to hear the Australian English, you know. I said, 'Oh my God, I don't understand anything!' And also when I started to say something, perhaps 'thank you' or, or something like that, the people say they didn't understand me. And I said, and I was crying, 'What am I doing here?' I feel much better now, but at the beginning, I was a bit depressed, no networks. I was really sick.

Home base networks: Bonding ties

Once I sat and cried with my doctor—a female, very nice girl and she help me a lot too. And I said, I don't know what's happening, what has happened. And she said this is normal. It's normal because you've changed your life too much, and, and when you are not too young, it's more difficult. And, and she helped me a lot, yes. And my husband, he's a really lovely man and patient. Point Leo was my place, and my first friends, that was where they lived. They are a lovely couple, and she helps me a lot. For me they are a special couple really. And also we have about three couples of Chilean friends.

Branching out networks: Bridging ties

And after a couple of weeks, I start to go to Frankston, a little town, to study English, the basic English. I was all day alone because my husband, he went to work.

Well, after two years, we move here to Mentone, very close to Cheltenham. And after I finished all the work at home, I started to think, What can I do now? My English was, well still not good, so I said I have to improve my English. What can I do? And I start to read. I didn't have a friend here or Australian people to talk to, and with my husband we talk in Spanish. My husband, he's a Chilean-born Australian citizen. I was always complaining to him. I said to him, 'Why don't you speak to me in English? Because I need to learn it. I need to do something else here.' But nothing happened. And one day I receive in the mail a community brochure, and I saw an advertisement. There's this certain Neighbourhood House. I got all the information that I need and I say, 'Oh I have to go there!' And I've been here ever since!

...at Cheltenham Neighbourhood House

That was one and a half years ago I came here to Cheltenham. And from the beginning, the Centre was very friendly. The staff were very, very nice and it was very, very good for me. It was something that I got for myself because I came here alone and not with my husband.

I came only for classes and to study a little bit and to have a chat with the girls. There was a friendly environment but I was a bit restless, and in Chile I worked very hard. Here nothing else, but studying English. So my life was boring, really boring. I, I felt so useless. 'What can I do?' I said to my husband. 'I want to do something, I need to work, but everywhere you need the language.'

That was when I started to work with the handicapped people here. Because I realised that I could do something. And that was when I said, 'Oh, I think I can, I think I can stay here. I think I can manage, I think I can enjoy being in Australia.'

This is how it happened. One day, after one month or something like that, I heard that one of the teachers needed some help in some course. And because I had a lot of time, I say 'Okay, can I help you? I don't know what you need but I hope I can help you.' And she said to me, 'Okay, yes, I need somebody to help me in the class with the handicap people.' I was a bit afraid. I did-

n't have any experience about that, but I said, 'Okay let me try, but I don't know if I can be helpful to you.' But then, when I started to help her, I realised that I can do a little bit. And again, it was something for myself. Here I start to be Modesta and not my husband's wife. That was very important to me.

I wanted to be part of the Australian people, of the community, okay, and to give something back. I can give something back and I'm still working with these people. They are really nice people. And I think that I've received more from them than I can give them because they... they give me love, friendship. They're really, really nice people.

...and now I move out into the community...

Now I feel a little bit Australian. I...I know I am. I think that I am, perhaps, a little bit part of the community. And, and I feel the...the love of the girls, the people here.

I've been working with that group for one and a half years. English is the only common language. We make a lot of mistakes but when we realise that we are making a mistake, we help each other.

One day I was talking with one of my class mates—Lucretia—and she told me that she was volunteering in the East Bentleigh Health Centre. I say, 'What are you doing there?' 'Oh, I work there with old people.' And I say, 'Well I think I have enough time and I can do something else.' And I went to East Bentleigh Community Health Centre and I start to work with old people there too, and this is once a week.

I've been working there about a month. It's a special group, because they don't live there—they come from their Houses to have a cup of tea or coffee every Thursday and also they play Bingo. It's a very nice group. Most of them live alone and they look forward to have a chat and to play Bingo and I really enjoy this group very much. I think that is the best way to learn a little bit English, because we have to speak English because nobody speaks our language.

The future

I'm helping Cara with organising the fete this year. I think that this week or next week we have a meeting. Last year it was here, outside. We got a lot of tables in the sun, and there was a lot of people and we made a lot of money. And this year, the idea is to sell food, typical food from the different country, and the money goes to make a library for the Centre. We need sometimes different books or tapes for listening to English.

I am doing a counselling course now, yes. It is for about 2 years. Perhaps I will need 3 years, or more. I don't know. But I hope that one day I will get it and then I will help more people. The teachers, they took me to this course. It's very helpful for me because I'm, I'm learning new words and listening to English. At my age, it's not easy to learn a new language.

Postscript...

I feel like now, as if I'm...I am Australian. I can be with Australian people and they accept my bad English and they are accepting me.

A new identity, yeah.

And also my independence.

Conclusion

Establishing new networks, dealing with tensions between bonding ties and bridging ties, transforming identities, desiring to reciprocate, finding a community in which give-and-take is welcome—these are the threads of social capital building common to Lucretia, Modesta and Cheltenham Neighbourhood House. Bonding ties are crucial. So are social capital dimensions of *externality* through bridging ties.

Lucretia and Modesta are lucky, it seems, and have made the move to expand their bonding ties and networks to the wider community. The cautionary note is that many new settlers are not so fortunate, and miss out on opportunities to make and use the bridges to the community. New settlers at Cheltenham Neighbourhood House meet with kindness, patience, mutuality and equality. On that basis they learn trust, confidence and risk-taking, and build their experience from bonding ties to bridging ties. Lucretia and Modesta tried out larger and less personal English language provision before Cheltenham.

In terms of the OECD indicators, there is clear evidence of impacts on economic wellbeing through the independence the two women have both achieved, and through their volunteerism both in the Cheltenham Neighbourhood House and at the Health Centre. Finding a purpose at the Cheltenham Neighbourhood House

positively affected Modesta's health and wellbeing. Command over goods and services are shown in both cases, as confidence and skills acquired to get a driver's licence and to use public facilities.

Cara, pondering over the key reason why Cheltenham works, says

It's the way we make people feel as if they belong,' she says. 'That's the way they learn that the new networks actually help to create that feeling of belonging, and that lets them take risks and say 'Well, I can do this now.'

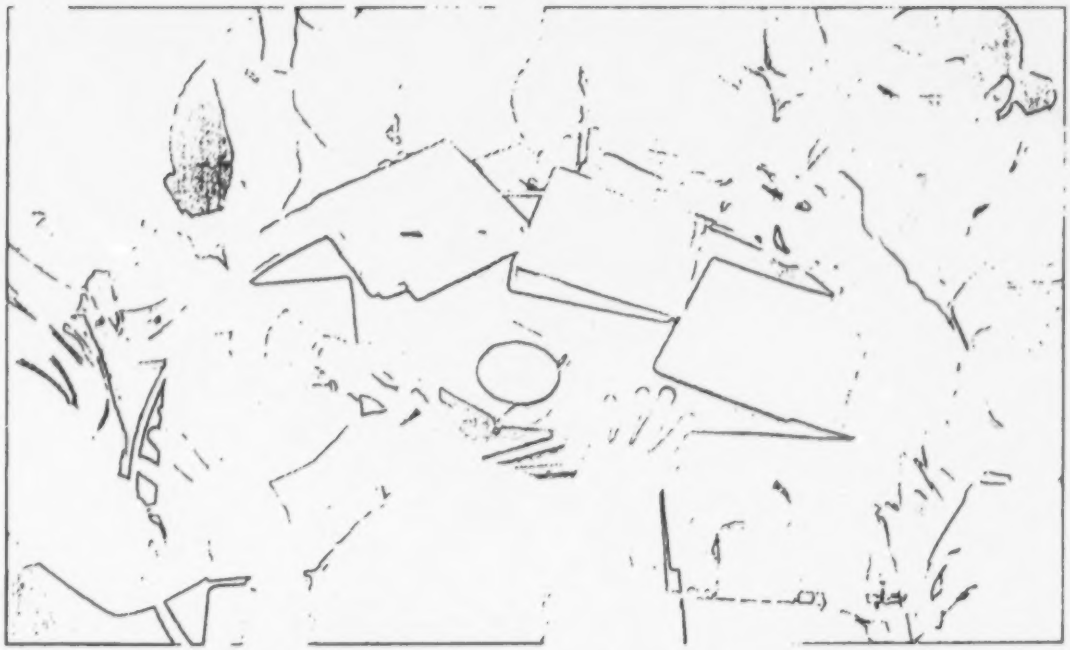
1 See Map 5 in the Appendix.

EIGHT

'We are the community':

Transformations of identity

Hawthorn Community Education Project (HCEP)



55

This portrait investigates transformation of identity through lifelong education for older students in the Hawthorn Community Education Project (HCEP). Lifelong learning opportunities for older people meet a wide range of individual and community needs, and develop skills, expertise and confidence of participants and volunteers. Sole reliance on health and welfare programs for older people is a mistake. Making learning available to them is more economically and socially viable. Education programs for older people, including those who are disadvantaged educationally and in other ways, transform and enrich the contribution of older people to their community.

We are the community you know, and if an individual through any association with HCEP or U3A, or any educational facility of any kind, experiences a greater sense of wellbeing, then since individuals are the community, the community then must be in a better state.

We are the community. The more people get involved—in anything—then the better the health of the community in general. A lot of drops make an ocean, you know.

(HCEP participant and member of the Management Group)

Older people identify as learners

Everyone has ways of presenting themselves to the world which, as Jim Gee[1] says, are:
...ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities.

Our identity is the aggregation and integration of attributes that determine how we see ourselves, how we decide to act and interact, and who we befriend. Perceptions of identity often prevent us from responding well to change, or persuade us to say, 'I can't do that—I'm not that kind of person'. Learning is about finding out that you can be 'that kind of person'. Learning is the journey we go through as we make our own changes to our identity in response to need or change in circumstance. We may need new knowledge, or we may need to transform the knowledge we already have by learning to see things in a different way.

These responses to change that we sum up as learning occur at all times in life. Some seek out these opportunities; others are reluctant unless spurred on by circumstance or supported by a sympathetic other. Learning in formal, nonformal or informal ways and settings weaves a seamless mesh sometimes called 'lifelong learning'- a vague term for many. Lifelong learning really means something very particular in the Hawthorn Community Education Project (HCEP) where investment in educational programs for older people saves public money. In the words of one of the tutors who work in the Learning for the Less Mobile program, HCEP promotes 'lifelong personal enthusiasm'.

Hawthorn is a mixed socio-demographic suburb[2]. HCEP's old suburban house huddles a block away from the busy commercial strip of Glenferrie Road, shadowed by the tall buildings of Swinburne University of Technology. Passers-by are a mixed group—business operators, ethnically diverse students, shoppers and, of course, HCEP students.

HCEP hosts Learning for the Less Mobile, Cooking Small—Eating Well, Wiser Driver and the Life Writing Correspondence course. It is a partner with the Hawthorn branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A). Students cross wide ranges of socio-economic status, interests and physical capabilities. There are Australian born and migrant people, people with ageing dilemmas, people with difficulties of mobility and access, and people isolated by age and lack of interests. There are poor and rich. Programs cater for them all, and in any one program there is likely to be a rich mix of all.

The scale and quality of HCEP's records and information is striking. In addition to standard record keeping they have internal reports, a small-scale evaluative research they commissioned, and a complete file of press clippings and other printed information going back in history to 1982. The information informs decision making and development. The media clips remind, not only of good times and bad, but of founding philosophies and visions.

Wh[illegible]

We sit on the narrow back verandah of HCEP's old-style house. All the rooms are busy. The verandah looks out on the car park and we watch the comings and goings of students and staff. Beyond the car park, tall buildings of surrounding office blocks loom, masking

any view of the horizon. The conversation starts with the way people shape their self-perceptions. Janice, the coordinator, leads off:
...being with other people is the confirmation of your own self worth...an affirmation that your opinion is worth something, that you do count.

Giselle is 75 and lives alone in a housing commission flat not far away. She smokes heavily, and says she enjoys the odd glass of wine. She is a member of the Life Writing Correspondence Course, an outreach program directed at mainly older people who are isolated for a variety of reasons; physical, sociological or geographical. 'Encouragers' (volunteer tutors) are matched to each writer to establish a relationship with them through fortnightly telelinks around a structured writing course. Writers eagerly look forward to discussion about the writing they have done so far. The works are published, and every year a high-profile community launch is held at venues like the beautiful Boroondara Town Hall.

Giselle says she was 'conned into' going to an afternoon tea HCEP hosted at the housing commission flats. Putting on afternoon tea was a way to connect with and encourage people to attend classes. Gillian, a staff member, explained:
...we got to meet the people and then gradually we were able to suggest...perhaps we could run some educational programs here, for your needs. Then we had a brainstorming session. Things that concerned them were health, safety and general wellbeing issues. So we were able to run that very first course looking at those topics that they were worried about. They accepted suggestions, and we were able to run our cooking and nutrition courses, because that was something that concerned them—just cooking for one person. Some of them had cooked for large families, some hadn't. Some of the older men on their own hadn't cooked much at all. So we were able to start off with those courses, and we've carried that through on a wider scale looking at issues that concern older people. Because those folk were having the courses go to them on their turf, they were more ready to accept us and some have joined other courses in the HCEP. Now that they know us, they seem to feel relaxed about the community worker.

Giselle had no friends, and didn't go out except to the shops occasionally. Before the program she thought:
Who am I now? You know, what can I do? What value am I to anybody? Even at my age there's nothing nicer than when I go shopping—I walk into a shop and they know me...

When Giselle heard of the Life Writing Correspondence program, and saw how it fitted her needs, she thought she would give it a go. In other words she would give identity reformation a go. Transformation of identity is at the core of ACE. Greg, a member of the Management Committee pointed out:
We cannot really define who we are as human beings when isolated on a desert island.

Isolation is worse than simply 'being alone'. Isolation deprives people of their identity and hence their capacity for personal wellbeing and social contributions.

Many people at HCEP, whether they are participants or staff, say they have done the usual transitions hard. Typical transitions are childhood to school, school to post-school (work, further study, unemployment), child to adult, single to partnered, partnered to widowed or divorced, work to retirement and retirement to death. Because many are older they have been through identity change on retirement. A U3A geology course made all the difference for a woman who always wanted to do geology but was stopped by marriage and child rearing.

Each stage of life pushes us to change. Change adjusts our perception of who we are. Often the circumstances of people around us are different, and we wonder why we feel detached from them, if indeed there *are* people around us. Unpredictable transitions are thrust on us too - poor health, accident, employment, income levels, and so on. Most of us experience a combination of circumstances. Each time we do, our identity shifts for better or for worse. Disintegration and reintegration happens repeatedly. Partners, friends, work, and good health may or may not come with us into the new stage.

Bill describes the way people he knows at HCEP feel, during the limbo stage of transition between retirement and a new identity:
...they're of no value...because their identity had been attached to their position in the world...

Health and wellbe

Does learning impact beneficially on mental and physical health and wellbeing? Tony, an HCEP/U3A student thinks so. 'I always say that U3A is putting psychiatrists out of business'. Giselle says 'I stopped going to the doctor for depression'.

Comments about the positive benefits of staying active physically and mentally are prolific. A member of the Management Group says, 'It contributes to physical health' and, almost jokingly, 'My arthritis feels better when I go out'.

Gillian, the staff member, confirms the health benefits of learning for the participants:
I think in terms of community health, learning is tremendously important [for] mental health with older people. For their feeling of...greater intellectual competence, their sense of wellbeing. Because they're involved in this sort of activity, they feel good about being involved in education and that has a positive effect.

The mental stimulation also keeps them very active intellectually so that keeps compounding in a positive way on their health as well. They don't have time to just sit at home and worry about their illnesses.

Of course there are other ways in which ACE transforms the health and wellbeing of these people's lives. Consider this story told by one of the HCEP staff about an ACE student:
Gabrielle was part of the Learning for the Less Mobile Program who had not come from an affluent background at all. She used to say she was crippled all her life. She had a baby in the women's hospital during the depression and was told by the nurses in there that she was a wicked woman because her husband was on 'the susso'—the sustenance handout or pension that was given to men during the depression. He was working on the roads or something like that. So she came from a quite humble background, and lived in a nursing home.

Gabrielle didn't ever say much and then when we were having this discussion—I think it must have been about the depression—she came up with this story about how she'd been called a wicked woman by the matron or the sister in the hospital. And she started to talk and she started to get more involved and joined in the conversation. She was living in this nursing home at the time and she was in a room with somebody who was totally deaf and somebody who had dementia. It was a fairly ordinary nursing home. She had nobody to talk to. Nobody to talk to at all. So she decided she wanted a radio. So one of the HCEP volunteers had a little transistor and they gave it to her, so she started listening to the radio.

One day, she came to us with a letter she'd written. She'd been coming here for quite a while by then. She'd written this letter to Derryn Hinch to say that she wanted a lady to come and wheel her wheelchair around the block so she could go out, and would we put a stamp on it and address this letter. She started to really influence her own life. She took some control over her life and I just sort of take a bit of pride in her.

Derryn Hinch broadcast the message and said that this lady in a nursing home wants a nice lady to come and wheel her around the block in the wheelchair and somebody from the Salvation Army did come and they wheeled her around the block and she had an outing once a week.

The effects on health and wellbeing are clear, but so too are the ways in which learning through ACE impacts on control over people's goods and services. Here, the catalyst was a new network met at HCEP.

Glennis, now nearing eighty, was a university lecturer and has published three books since retirement. Years of health problems include a successful but debilitating operation for a brain tumor. For a time she was housebound. Her mind was active, but her body held her back.

The role of networks

Glennis has enjoyed, and is enjoying the fullness of life. She has accumulated and analysed life from many angles. Her conciseness, acuity and perception are unparalleled. She is sharp. The phrase 'a mind like a steel trap' comes to mind. Her years in the competitive academic environment challenged her intellect but damaged her attitudes to later-life community activity. She sees excessive competition as inappropriate for a society wanting to shape itself into a socially cohesive community. She says:
If only governments would realise that this kind of lifelong learning is cost effective. It keeps you out of nursing homes, keeps you away from the doctor, gives you a reason to get up in the morning—yes, it reduces the cost of home care for me.

The Cooking Small—Eating Well program enriched her life with a better diet and was her gateway to support networks from the HCEP.

Bringing all her resources of expertise and knowledge to bear, reflecting on her years as a scholar and an ageing person, from psychological, social, and every other

perspective, she says *the* single most important thing for society to do for its ageing population is:
Keeping them open to channels of communication. Keeping them open to as many communication channels as possible, for as long as possible.'

Networks, and links between the networks of our close groups and wider, external communities, construct social capital. A sympathetic understanding of those who share our values and common interests are comfortable and rewarding, but not enough. Giselle, Gabrielle and Glennis show that links to external networks, or bridging ties, outside the 'strictly comfortable' are imperative. They keep our brains ticking and they yield up information and greater control of our own destinies through wider choices and better health, goods and services.

Trust, external networks and learning

Being open to new networks of people and new experiences takes trust. Trust and learning are interwoven. In a spiraling and reciprocal way, learning to trust is fundamental to the capacity to learn. In the case of children, forming trusting relationships with parents and teachers is a prerequisite for effective learning, a pattern that holds true for life. Meryl is a member of the Management Committee and a participant in U3A. She backs this observable connection up:
[Trust is] something you have to learn, built up over a period of time with our clients here. You know...when you first go to visit them, sometimes they put up a little barrier against themselves. They don't even want to come out, into the first line of contact, which is a face that they can relate to. Gradually they'll come, and we'll ring them up and speak to them before their next visit. And gradually you do develop an individual relationship with them. Then, all the faces around them start to look friendly and then it's not as forbidding. I'm talking about an isolated person—probably somebody that's lost contact with society and left work over a period of time. By the time they get to us or they are drawn to our attention, they've been isolated sometimes for quite a while.

The 'learning spiral' evident here is repeated in many stories. The hesitation and tentativeness in these seemingly extreme cases is paralleled by the shock experienced by new migrants, documented in the case about the Cheltenham Neighbourhood House. Building trust is, as these people say, fundamental to bridging the gap between their withdrawal into themselves, and their movement into the HCEP learning environment. This is not serendipitous, but deliberate as Meryl explains:
The centre works well at really building that rapport. I think rapport then builds into trust. We contact them before the next session or program to say 'Hi how are you?' Or if someone hasn't been well, the understanding is that the facilitator rings and asks 'How are you? Do you think you are going to be well enough to come in?' So again the trust is there, and it comes back to the basic sense of being valued. Someone really does care about them. They think 'I wasn't there last week and they noticed. I am someone'.

I press a group of the Management Committee to describe specifically what they mean about building trust. I am interested in *how* this slippery beast called 'trust' is manufactured 'on the ground'. Building trust is about starting with shared interests and values, they explain. An example is given by one of the committee members:
Well, you could go there and they could have a plant in their garden that you might have too, or something like that. Or there might be some other way that you can relate to them. And you say, 'Oh I'm with you, I've got that too', or 'I do that', or 'I like that'. You know, just some sympathy and empathy.

Sympathy, empathy, trust, self-confidence, self-esteem—all words and phrases common in the field of adult education, and known to matter. Yet in these times of hard-nosed economic rationalism and accountability talk about sympathy, empathy, trust and self-confidence can sound too 'soft' even though these qualities take tough people and hard decisions to implement in ways that move people on. But rapport and trust are the first steps we take to lifelong learning, and when adult educators choose shared interests and values as a starting point, follow up absences, ring to reinforce arrangements and so on, they know what they are doing and they get the results to prove it.

Giselle from the housing commission flats, Gabrielle from the nursing home, and Glennis who was housebound, are graphic illustrations that trust, building external network links, and learning are interdependent. Through education in community settings they transform their identities and gain richer and more rewarding lives.

Conclusion

The HCEP shows how ACE transforms micro human activity into broader community and social outcomes in the categories of health, education and learning, time and leisure, and command over goods and services. It is commonplace for adult education students to step up their control over goods and services in ways ranging from critical consumerism to activism around local issues, to leadership roles in clubs and associations. But of the eight OECD categories, the strongest impact HCEP has is on health of older people.

There are two reciprocal cost benefits from investment in the education of older people. Cost-savings for the individuals, the community and governments in reduced medical and paramedical infrastructure and services are obvious. Reciprocal cost-benefits also flow from the direct contribution to society made by people with increased social and intellectual capital. Many older people who began as ACE students are now making a voluntary commitment to helping others including serving on the Management Committee and one-to-one teaching of the less mobile or others in need.

The contribution of the HCEP to society goes well beyond the immediate community. Statewide uptake of the Wiser Driver program and visits by HCEP members to Canberra to give evidence to parliamentary committees on issues associated with ageing people make this clear.

Recalling the words of Jim Gee at the outset, HCEP changes these older people's ways of being in the world, especially their perceptions about transitions from one way of being to another. Their description of new ways of living show that lifelong learning helps them to integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes into changed social identities.

ACE is much more than a warm and fuzzy feel-good experience. It benefits real people and society in real ways. It has direct outcomes on the quality of people's lives. These benefits to individuals are transferred in a visible and direct line to the community in which the person lives. In many instances, these benefits can be seen to travel further, and impact on the broader society. The micro activities that occur at this site have the capacity to impact on the wider community because, as the introductory words of an HCEP member reminds us, 'We are the community'.

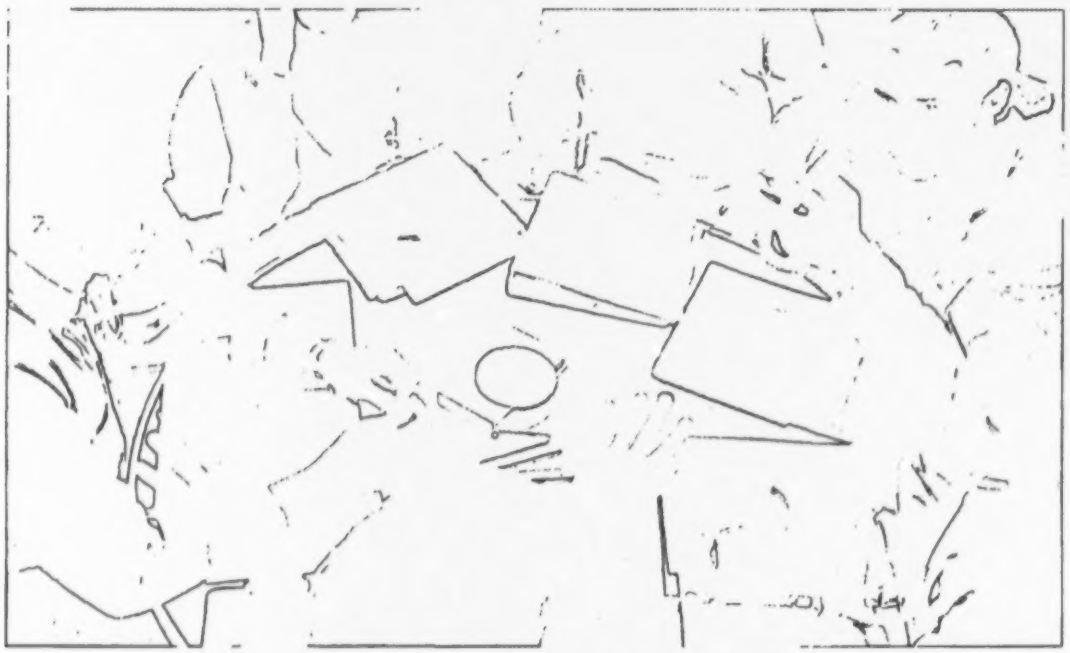
1 Gee, J. 1996, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in discourses*, Taylor & Francis, USA, p. 127.
2 See Map 6 in the Appendix.

NINE

Connected:

Rural women build social cohesion through literacy

Cobram Community House



Yes I can! is a women's literacy program, offered by Cobram Community House. It interacts with the life of a rural town and contributes to the wellbeing and lifelong learning needs of women who are not in the paid workforce or who are otherwise marginalised. The program takes a holistic approach to teaching time and stress management, budgeting, assertiveness, computing, self-defence, self-image, communication and work readiness. By setting out to create a learning network for participants Cobram Community House uses the generation of social capital as a key teaching strategy.

What we are trying to do is say 'Forget about all that—it's gone—you're a good person—you have a lot of skills and you have a lot to offer—not only the community but your own family and friends and the networks that you belong to.

(Cobram Community House staff member)

Strong networks knit social cohesion

People shut out of social, community and employment networks, most often experience disadvantage from their isolation. In Cobram low levels of confidence in literacy performance exacerbate isolation and disadvantage because they inhibit membership of community based learning networks. The *Yes I can!* program was created by Cobram Community House for rural women with poor reading and writing abilities. The program itself becomes a learning community with the power to break down barriers of isolation, low self-confidence and withdrawal from networks by building self-esteem. New connections forged to the community are positive. Benefits to wellbeing are multi-faceted: they relate to health, improved educational levels, better personal safety, increased command over goods and services, and a positive impact on the social environment.

Cobram Community House implements a diverse range of ACE programs for the surrounding community. They use two buildings: a five roomed 'house' and an eight roomed 'tin shed' in town next to the kindergarten.

Cobram is a rural, Murray River centre[1] for agricultural activities: mainly fruit growing, dairying, food processing factories, tourism and some light industry. Despite employment generated by food-processing, high unemployment persists as opportunities contract for labour intensive work in rural industries.

The Community House has just got access to Centrelink resources and services for people who can't get over to Shepparton, the nearest regional city, 64 kilometres away. Official unemployment is high but is thought to be much higher because so many are employed part-time or on a casual basis. The coordinator says, *Mostly the figures that you receive are about people who receive full unemployment benefits. If you only work six hours a week they are not classified as unemployed but they are not on a full wage'.*

Cobram and district has a population of around 7000[2]. Cobram and areas west of Cobram have low proportions of women holding any post-school qualification, as a proportion of all qualified people in the Moira Shire. The district has a pattern of migration common to many intensive food production regions in rural and riverine Australia, superimposed on older, mainly Anglo-Celtic populations. Other ethnic groups who migrated after World War 2 augment a strong Italian presence. About 30 families from Iraq are the most recent arrivals. Some attend Cobram Neighbourhood House for government-funded English as Second Language programs.

Literacy as social capital

Part of the explanation for Australia's low adult literacy, lies in post-war migration. Australian communities absorbed many people from language and cultural backgrounds other than English. Of the 1.1 million Australians who were born overseas, whose first language is not English, and who arrived in Australia before 1981, over half were still at Level 1 in terms of English prose, document and quantitative literacy in 1996, fifteen years later.[3]

Some children from English-speaking backgrounds in the Cobram area were affected by certain social mores and family economic imperatives of the time, which took students out of school at the minimum school leaving age. Financial, peer and family pressure to leave school

played a part. Boys would often 'go back onto the land'. Girls could get a job in one of the factories in the area and then marry and give up paid work. One woman in the *Yes I can!* program said, '

I wanted to go on but it would have meant leaving my group and I didn't want to do that. My Dad couldn't see the need for girls to get an education.

Though community attitudes to education have changed in rural Australia, the practice of leaving school as soon as possible persists in some families. The opportunity to work in factories and/or to do seasonal work, exercises a strong pull in Cobram, especially on young people who find school difficult or irrelevant. Literacy levels of early school leavers are not high.[4] 'I didn't learn anything at school since Grade 5 and none of the teachers helped me', said another *Yes I can!* woman.

The literacy difficulties experienced by *Yes I can!* women are widespread amongst Australian adults. They are serious and pervasive, usually underestimated by the general public, and too often ignored by public policy. Around 20 per cent of Australians between the ages of 15 and 74 years are located at Level 1;[5] (the lowest of four levels) and 30 per cent are at Level 2. Around half a million Australian adults at literacy Level 1 need help with everyday tasks: reading information from government agencies, businesses and other institutions, writing notes, or filling out forms such as applications or bank deposit slips.[6]

One of the values we have is that *everyone* should be literate. In some cultures no stigma attaches to being unable to read or write, because a scribe is paid for that set of skills. In Western countries high levels of stigma are attached to those who cannot read, write and carry out functional numeracy tasks with ease. Literacy is thus 'relative to factors such as purpose, time, place and personal judgement'.[7] Research shows that social capital and the literacy capacities of individuals and communities are interrelated: 'The networks, norms and trust of social interaction are given meaning and communicated through the literacy webs spun within a community'.[8]

Basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are only part of what is required to be even moderately literate in our society. A literate person needs technical skills, critical intelligence, emotional maturity, knowledge, values, norms, networks and so on, to not only 'read between the lines', but also to link to wider networks. The social commentator and literacy educator, Paolo Freire[9], saw literacy as not just reading the word, but reading the world. *Yes I can!* achieves this end – women who can 'read the word' and 'read the world'. It uses a broad-based curriculum, designed for Australian adults, which is explicit about both word and world.

A course [illegible] needs

Yes I can! is a women's course designed to be taught as part of the Victorian Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA).[10] The CGEA is widely used through out Australia and is a dynamic curriculum framework for comprehensive adult basic education. The core framework covers reading, writing, oracy, and numeracy. The CGEA also has a stream of General Curriculum Options where teachers develop content of particular relevance to their students.

The *Yes I can!* program was designed by members of Cobram Neighbourhood House and is a nationally 'recognised short course'. Cobram uses it as a General Curriculum Option of the CGEA. It was designed to help local women excluded from networks which grow up around community activism, study or paid work. Because of the course, women students grow in confidence. They acquire basic skills for personal development, work and/or further learning through content like basic office skills, computer skills, personal development, self-defence, cooking and group behaviour.

The accreditation document[11] argued:

Women often wish to acquire more control over the direction of their own lives...This course provides an opportunity for them to develop skills, knowledge and confidence and to make their own judgement about future directions. The course also provides support networks to facilitate the success of their goals.

The issue of agency is addressed on a number of fronts. The coordinator explained why personal appearance is included:

If you look good you feel good. You know, just because you've got no money, it doesn't matter. You can shop at St. V. and pick up great stuff and look good and you're half way there. For women out of work it would also help their self-esteem to acquire jobs...The image they want to project is their choice.

A session in self-defence increases physical confidence and security:
Self-defence does help self-esteem. The chap we had was gentle. But it is the empowerment of saying, 'OK. You know how to do things if you are in trouble'...If someone says something you don't have to take it – you can walk away from the rubbish. They could go out at nights and not feel afraid of being harassed.

To meet the needs of accreditation and document the course for others to use, the original four-week program expanded into a 200-hour course known for accreditation purposes as "Course in Women's Access". Canoeing, computer skills, cooking and cash handling in one way or another all address four key lifelong learning principles: multiplicity, connectedness, critical intelligence and agency. Teaching and learning practices are overtly social. The accreditation document[12] stresses that:
Group learning is essential for this course. It builds on women's strengths, develops interpersonal skills and enables support networks, which are an element of successful adult learning, to be developed.

'Women are encouraged to realise their connectedness to other women'

The importance of networks is a central theme of this anthology. Many instances and nuances of ACE based networking are explored. Of them all, *Yes I can!* is the instance that most explicitly and consciously articulates how networks are integral to ACE learning. This raises a broader gender issue about the role and relation of men and women in the construction of social capital in ACE, and in the wider community. *Yes I Can!* was developed by women, for women, in an educational sector where women are 75% of students and possibly 90% of teachers and organisers. Even though "women only" courses are fairly rare in ACE, women have steeped ACE culture with an approach to learning which marks it out as different and complementary to other sectors. They tackle some of the toughest educational assignments of all – ACE has a reputation for opening educational doors to those who can't tolerate, and those who can't be tolerated by, other educational environments.

Yes I Can! tackles one of these tough educational challenges with educational practices honed and defined by women:

The development of community networks is an empowerment practice, particularly in rural areas or places where the community can be supportive. Women are encouraged to realise...their connectedness to other women.

Women with low literacy skills or low self-esteem and who have left school early are less likely to find meaningful, secure or well-paid work. They tend to be excluded from a wide range of community, social and economic networks. If they are also geographically isolated and without family support, they are likely to be particularly disadvantaged on a wide range of economic and social indicators. The *Yes I can!* program curriculum developer noted:
We're not that isolated but yet we are - we've got a lot of rural women around the area, a lot who have raised families and that sort of thing and they have no current work history - lots of women who are looking to find something to do, perhaps go out and get some work but have no confidence and have childcare issues and all that sort of thing. The Yes I can! course was born from those needs.

The Community House is an important community resource. As its coordinator explained:
There is no TAFE in the region. The nearest TAFE is at Shepparton and it takes a full day to go down and back by public transport. But we can offer the same course at a lower price...Our problem is funding and offering courses for small numbers- we need flexibility to offer courses to meet the needs of people that we know will benefit from that course, even if it is only for three or four people.

Getting women to enrol takes a lot of effort. Women are 'reached' by Community House staff through a process that involved building trust and confidence. In many cases ordinary, day-to-day activities are used to build trust and persuade women that it's safe to join the course.

Women with very low literacy levels are unlikely to identify as lifelong learners, and have not usually experienced enough of the self-affirmation that positive schooling or adult education can bring. They are also unlikely, without encouragement and support, to attempt any form of adult education to acquire better literacy skills. For some, the literary demands of many entry-level TAFE and ACE accredited courses are way beyond their current literacy capacities.

Many hide their lack of literacy from shame. They fear

ridicule and humiliation. A friend of one student observed:

We've been friends for 14–15 years, but I'd known her for several years before she told me that she couldn't read. She was very clever at hiding it. After I knew, I helped her to hide it from others because she didn't want anyone to know.

Some students are on their own because family or partners are gone. They are lost and lonely, inhabiting the fringes of the community, until they are drawn further in by the course. Others are victims of abuse, and live without trust. As the program coordinator puts it:

They have been left out there – they are alone. Some have come out of terrible situations and their children have grown up and they feel that they can't do anything and they're useless. Their husbands leave them ...there's quite a lot of bashings - a lot not reported because they'll get bashed up again.

Older women outside of support networks and without experience of adult learning have few options to change their situation. And the situation tends to replicate itself across generations, as the coordinator said:

Young girls don't mix easily. They don't find jobs—they don't like school so where do they go? They are suddenly alone. What do you do with your life? You've got to keep going and you say to yourself, 'If I can do that it would be good'. For years you've been saying (to yourself), 'I can't do anything'—but know you can do it. It doesn't kill you, and they gain confidence and...Yes I can!

The mix of older and younger women is an advantage says the tutor: '...to have older people with younger people put together, they learn from each other'.

Courses specifically for rural women had previously been offered in the region through the Rural Access Program. However, staff at Cobram Community House were mindful of a group of women who needed a more broadly-based course to overcome barriers of adversity, isolation, low levels of literacy, ill-health, loneliness, and lack of confidence. The staff knew the potential of the women was held back:

'...if you're told often enough that you're no good and stupid, you start to believe it'.

'The co... confidence...

A learning community can carry fringe dwellers into social and economic networks. The following scenario is typical of adult literacy student perceptions, and the reasons they cite for their learning dilemmas.

The student had undertaken eight weeks of *Yes I Can!* courses.

THE SCHOOL TOUR

At school none of the teachers wanted to help me—my friends didn't like me and would always bully me. I didn't like school that much. At school I got basically harassed because I couldn't keep up with the work because I couldn't stand up and do oral presentations and I couldn't put in an essay assignment because of my reading problem and no-one would help. They'd whack you straight in front of class and I would go all red and do the minimum and sit down. I just got Ds and Es, or something like that.

It is horrible. I got left totally and my cousin who is older than me left school and he said, 'This is stupid. They are not teaching me anything at all and I am leaving'. And he left and went on drugs.

THE ADULT EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

[In] the...classes—We had these sheets and anything we had to do I thought will be daunting, and I thought, 'I'm not going to get through' and I was the first one to finish every time. I thought, 'That was pretty good'. I felt like I'd learned something as well. Being able to speak in front of people—just knowing that someone else is actually listening to me and not saying something behind my back. I was nervous and I thought they are all about the same as me—there's nothing to hide. They were all very, very nice people.

Another said:
I learned things about office machines and banking and now I can go to the bank and write cheques and handle money.

Fear - of detection, of public humiliation, and of refusal if they were to ask for the help they need —shuts the women out of the very social networks that can help. The costs are great —they shy away from networks where they could find out about jobs, they miss out on breast cancer screening programs, and they miss out on the warmth and security of social cohesion. Adult literacy classes can start to reverse all that:
I used to be afraid to talk to people but now in my job I find that people come to me in the shop and chat and I am really good at talking to people.

Confidence is needed for lifelong learning to develop:
The course gave me the confidence to go on and I have done a computing course since.

Not all women succeed, and some take much longer than others do. A history of negative education experiences can demolish self-confidence, throw up protective barriers, or be manifest in unhelpful behaviour which interferes with learning:
[The course] was good but I have problems reading and writing. A lot of forms I couldn't fill in and that made me agitated. I'd go home and I would cry. They would just push it in front of you and expect you to be able to [do] it. When I started, they knew I couldn't read and write very good, so I think they should have helped me a bit. I should have spoken up too. You'd see people writing and you'd think, 'They're writing away and they'll be on to the next question', and I thought 'Oh, just leave it', and I'd sit there and cry.

The same woman also said:
I enjoyed the canoeing, I'd never been canoeing and we sailed up the river—and the cooking and stuff, that, I could understand. I enjoyed it but when it comes to reading and writing I find it very hard. Yes, it was good and it learned me to mix more and I made three new friends out of it.

Her friend confirmed the changes:
She's more open and talks to me more. She told me she wanted me to come along today to talk to you and once, it would have taken her a week of beating about the bush to tell me. Now she rings me up. She talks to people more.

Another student started to do volunteer work with a friend. The friend said:
She wouldn't say 'boo' to any of them or she might just say 'hello'. But now she goes in and she'll have a chat and ask them about the weather or ask what they've been doing or done. She'll say, 'What have you been up to?' and talk to them. She wouldn't have done that before.

Close friendships foster bonding ties; bonding ties boost confidence. Confidence grows and bridges outwards to networks, a theme taken up elsewhere.[14] The women say: 'I'm not so shy any more'; 'I speak to people more now'; or 'I've made new friends'. Observers confirm this.

All of the women made some new friends and somewhat enlarged their networks. They reported limited evidence of reciprocity but many contribute to the community and to their own learning in radically different ways. Several have paid or unpaid work or are in other courses at the Community House. Like Margaret in Ballarat[15], several used the Community House as a safe and trusted haven. Personal care and help from the staff increased their trust of others.

Standing Back

The link between literacy and self-esteem is not one way:
...the development of self-respect is a necessary condition of learning. ... Without self-respect, learning potential is diminished. When we think of ourselves as inadequate, not up to the task, as less worthy than others, our learning legs are cut off at the knees. A feeling of worthlessness ... can overpower everything else, including a sense we can learn.[16]

The *Yes I can!* program, integrated into the broad based CGEA curriculum in adult basic education, recognises that problems and solutions for adult literacy students go well beyond one dimensional views of literacy as a technical 'reading and writing' phenomenon. The course demonstrates the wisdom of an inclusive curriculum, '...designed around personal, community and family settings and contexts. It shows that there is a very strong demand for these programs as alternatives to vocationally oriented or employment-training programs'.[17]

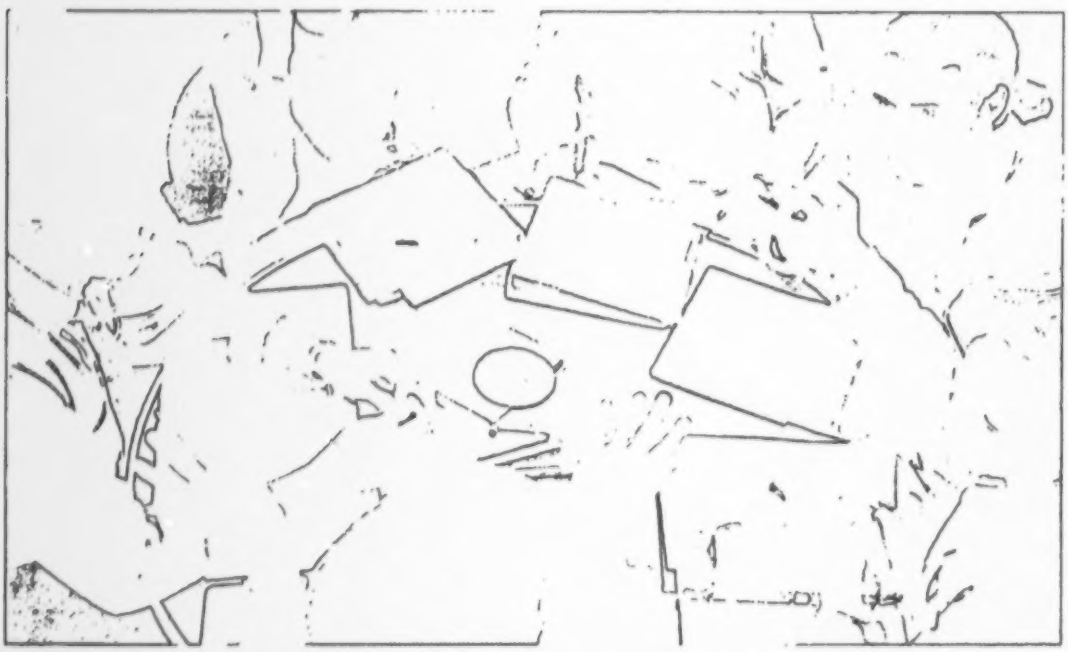
The *Yes I can!* course is an excellent example of how literacy and social connectedness are synonymous with building social cohesion. Low levels of literacy are an intractable problem and have big social ramifications. Women getting literacy assistance in this course are the tip of Cobram's iceberg of educational disadvantage. Many more women in the Cobram area endure isolation from community networks because they can't read. Kept out of networks by poor reading ability, they are kept ignorant of the existence of safe yet powerful learning networks in their own neighbourhood. Social capital is desirable and quantifiable in a community. Connecting women with poor reading abilities to trustworthy learning networks gives them the chance to read the word and the world.

1 See Map 7 in the Appendix.
2 ABS census: Cobram postcode 3644 population in 1996 was 7200.
3 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, *Aspects of Literacy: Assessed skill levels, Australia, 1996*, Cat No 4229.0, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, pp. 51–55.
4 Wickert, R. 1989, *No Single Measure*, Summary Report, National Policy on Languages Initiative, pp. 4–5.
5 ibid, p. 82.
6 ibid, Table 4.1.3, p. 44.
7 ibid, p. 23.
8 Falk, I. & Balatti, J.1999, 'Social capital, literacy ecologies and lifelong learning', Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, Reprint Series R7/1999, p. 8.
9 Freire, P. & Macedo, D. 1987, *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
10 Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) within the Victorian Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Accreditation Framework.1993, State of Victoria: Adult, Community and Further Education Board and the State Training Board Victoria.
11 Women's Access Pathway Program 'Yes I Can' Accreditation Document, November 1998.
12 ibid, p. 7.
13 ibid, pp. 7–8.
14 Cheltenham Neighbourhood House.
15 Chapter 1 is about the Ballarat East Community House.
16 Blunden, R. 1997, 'Literacy needs self-respect', *The Age*, 14 October, p. 26.
17 Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, *Aspects of Literacy: Assessed skill levels, Australia, 1996*, Cat No 4229.0, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, pp. 51–55.

TEN

Leadership in a rural region:

Gippsland Community Leadership Program
SCOPE Quality Learning
Morwell.



69

In the last decade, social and economic changes drained much of Gippsland's social capital away. The Gippsland Community Leadership Program offered through SCOPE Quality Learning redevelops social capital by targeting community leaders who are key builders of social capital. The program expands notions of community and encourages the leaders to break away from negative social, cultural and physical constraints on their leadership. Networks of community leaders and potential leaders form and join a continuous process of personal and community transformation.

We're developing a network of people here that have been through a learning process ... [who] now understand that Gippsland has to find ways of working together and they're going to be part of that...

(Gippsland Community Leadership Program Coordinator)

Introduction

Social capital is as valuable to a community as human capital, physical capital and financial capital. Social capital is the outcome of myriads of interactions that blend people's values and networks into mutual trust and confidence, thereby allowing community members to work together and pool resources for the common good. The worth to a community of more concrete resources, such as funding, buildings and parks, is often dependent on social capital. Social capital will be the force that determines how well, or how badly, tangible resources are used. Like tangible resources, social capital can be run down, or lose its value.

In the last decade, economic and social changes in the Gippsland region have depleted and devalued its stock of social capital. Loss of social capital is keenly felt in many towns and townships across the region. The region has suffered massive unemployment, withdrawal of government services, population decline, and uncertain futures. Community confidence, leadership, common purpose and direction—all indicators of social capital—are eroded.

But rural communities are rallying. In Morwell an ACE organisation known as SCOPE Quality Learning leads a social capital rebuilding project. The Gippsland Community Leadership Program uses some of what remains of old social capital in the region to construct new social capital. Communities can't live in the past. They can't sustain themselves or prosper if they confine themselves to past social and economic practices.

The region

Gippsland is a diverse triangle of around 215 000 people, bordered by mountains, sea and city - the Great Dividing Range, Bass Strait and the eastern edge of Melbourne. The economy is diverse, but relies most on agriculture (dairy, beef, sheep and horticulture), timber (in particular, a large paper mill) and energy. The energy industry comprises electricity generation, coal mining, offshore oil and gas production, and associated engineering. Newly emerging industries include tourism, education and information technology.

In the 1990s, the Gippsland region, and the La Trobe Valley especially, experienced major change. The Valley has seen it all: deregulation, restructuring, downsizing, competition, amalgamations and privatisations. The energy industry in particular has been restructured (over a decade) and then privatised (over the past five years), resulting in large-scale redundancies, high unemployment, and a difficult social climate. Local government was restructured, with the amalgamation of the central Gippsland Shire Councils of Morwell, Traralgon and Moe to form the La Trobe Valley Shire. In 1999, the region coped with the second highest unemployment rate in Australia.

In the Morwell region alone, with a population of 60 000, some 7000 jobs have been lost with consequent dislocation of people. Many left the region. Others eke out a living on unemployment benefits. Some can't sell their houses and thus finance a move to areas where employment is more readily available. People on low incomes move in to take advantage of cheap housing options, both public and private. As the Gippsland Community Leadership Program coordinator explains, 'The loss of 7000 jobs was massive. The restructuring

has probably had the biggest social and employment impact in any region in Australia'.

Other parts of Gippsland are hurting due to changes and anticipated changes in the timber, fishing and dairying industries. As one travels east and north in Gippsland, public transport links peter out, and these transport cul de sacs breed isolation and alienation. Shopping areas and government regional offices contract out or close down. Poverty and loss of infrastructure eat away at community morale.

The people of Gippsland are in transition toward new ways of working and new ways of identifying themselves in their communities. The workforce is smaller, the kind of work being done is different, and the basis of employment has shifted towards part time and casual work. The Leadership Program manager explains that changes have led to both fear and distrust in the community:
International companies were buying most of the businesses. They knew that there was distrust and fear in the community and they needed to assist the community. They brought a new style of work culture into the region and began to explore ways to rebuild the communities.

The upside is that new opportunities are possible:
I see hope for the area because it was unhealthy, to some extent, for a significant region such as this to be solely reliant on one industry. Now there's other organisations coming into the region to service the out-sourcing, and they are bringing new intellectual skills, more marketing skills.

The provider

In this environment SCOPE Quality Learning, a non-profit, community managed organisation, provides ACE and Disability services. SCOPE began operations in a small way in 1978 at Yallourn High School and now operates in the heart of 'the Valley': Morwell, Moe and Traralgon. SCOPE is one of Victoria's biggest ACE providers with 23 full-time staff. The program coordinator sees that SCOPE is there:
... to assist in the transition, and with the stresses and strains on family, business and the community.

The organisation responds proactively to community need. One of its six goals[1] is to 'initiate and support community development'. Another is to 'develop and maintain constructive relationships/partnerships with other education providers and organisations'. SCOPE anticipates community reciprocity in a third goal: 'to advance the community's recognition and support of SCOPE'. The Gippsland Community Leadership Program is one example of the many ways this ACE provider exercises its own form of leadership in community development.

The Program

The Gippsland Community Leadership Program began in 1996 using the Melbourne-based Williamson Community Leadership Program as a model. Concern about the human resource aspects of economic and social change generated SCOPE's interest in 'growing leaders' for the Gippsland region.

Over the last decade changes outlined above forced many leaders from the district. The changing environment demands a different kind of leadership from those who remain and those who have the potential to be come leaders in the future. The program coordinator outlines the context:
Skilled people leave because jobs go ... we're in danger of having an intellectual drain as a result of the rundown of rural regions generally. The people we really miss are the movers and shakers, the people who can grab an issue run with it, and make things happen. You need lots of those. There are still some here but the region would be far more effective if there were more of them.
The other thing is that there is a lot of parochialism in Gippsland communities. It's a historical factor about Gippsland and it's got to do with the way it was settled. A number of places have been seen as the capital of Gippsland. This has made it hard to present a united front. It sub-optimises our capability... particularly in winning funds that flow from Federal and State where this region is in competition with other regions.

In the language of social capital, the new leadership dimension brought in by the program is 'externality'. Externality is how we relate to the 'outside world'; that is, the people, ideas, and issues that are outside the 'space' in which we normally operate. Externality is not only about developing and using networks although that is very important. It is also about *seeing* ourselves as part of communities other than, and larger than, the one(s) that make up our 'comfort zone'. The leadership program looks out over all of Gippsland, and beyond, encouraging a new world view. The program manager

believes that '... creating a better understanding of the diversity of issues affecting the community' will strengthen community cohesion:
We're developing a network of people here that have been through a learning process that has really exposed this issue. They now understand that Gippsland has to find ways of working together and they're going to be part of that rather than being South Gippsland versus La Trobe Valley versus East Gippsland versus West Gippsland....

The selection process seeks diversity and existing community involvement. Participants are drawn from a broad spectrum of the community:
Twenty-five Gippsland leaders, with the potential to develop further, are then chosen. Diversity across regional boundaries and professions are essential elements of the program.[2]

Individuals are chosen for their leadership skills and community contribution as documented by the applicant. Potential participants are leaders in the workplace, in the community, or both. They demonstrate commitment to be more effective in the community. In any one group there are leaders from business and government. A typical group has participants from large and small business; farming and the environment; government, unions and law enforcement; health, education, welfare and the disability services. Geographic representation is just as critical and clearly acknowledged by participants as instrumental in their desire to be involved. As one manager says:
I went on the Program to broaden my perspective. My area of management is South Gippsland and I was born and bred in South Gippsland. I tend to have fairly parochial views about South Gippsland and this was an opportunity to broaden my views.

The ACFE Board funds SCOPE for the educational component of the Leadership Program. Additional local government and business sponsorship throughout Gippsland pays for venues, publications and speakers. Participants also rely on support from the organisation, business, government sector or community organisation which employs them. The guidelines for selection tell nominees they 'must have the support of their employer as it would be impossible to commit the time without their support'.[3]
There is a pre-course weekend residential, fortnightly full day events for ten months and an end-of-course weekend residential. Certificates are awarded only to those who have attended at least 80 per cent of the Program.

The program is not skill based. Rather, it is a forum for the exchange of ideas. Awareness of regional issues is heightened and informed. New relationships and networks spread across the region. Each fortnight the day's proceedings focus on one particular issue. Outside speakers are chosen for their ability to provide wider perspectives. Participants are encouraged to examine the issue of the day through questions and discussion.
Proceedings are confidential. A secure environment allows members and visitors to be frank, express a range of viewpoints, and probe issues in ways that aren't possible in a more open situation.

The diversity of the 1999 course topics and venues is illustrated in the table below. Meetings are held in different places, so participants become familiar with parts of Gippsland they otherwise would not visit.

Table 3: *Leadership Program: Topics and Venues for 1999*

Topic	Venue
Small, medium and emerging business	Geo Eng site visit: Gippsland Aeronautics
Media	Central Gippsland TAFE, Yallourn
Government	Parliament House
Technology	RAAF, Sale
Education	Monash Gippsland
The energy industry	Edison Mission Energy
Employment	Australian Paper
Environment	East Gippsland Shire Office, Lakes Entrance
Tourism and Regional Development	Cowes Cultural Centre, Bass Coast Shire
Health and Community Services	La Trobe Regional Hospital
Law and Order/ Social Justice	Wellington Shire / Fulham Correctional Centre
Agriculture	Bonlac (Darnum)
Arts/Culture	Baw Baw Shire

According to the coordinator the key to success is in learning interactions:
It works because you're bringing people with such diverse backgrounds together into a pressure cooker situation where they just have to share thoughts and ideas. And therefore you get the people from the hard-nosed, business and accounting sort of world making statements

about unemployment or youth and debating them with the social worker. And they start to realise that some of the decisions they make do have an impact in these areas. Or you get the social welfare people who begin to understand that there really are business issues and economic fundamentals that have to be confronted. And you've got all the crossovers—people from the rural sector, the farmers, the tourist operators, people talking about what river flows really mean in relation to the biggest lakes system in Australia ....

It's that opening up of people's minds to a much broader range of issues. It's making the person more holistic in their views of themselves and of their business and where they fit.

By 1999 nearly 100 leaders in the region had graduated and formed an alumni network. To increase the value of the program as a community resource, a web site was built by a graduate who said he aimed to:
...to raise the profile of the Leadership Program and the Alumni collectively, to make more Gippsland people aware of the Program, and hopefully to provide a method for other people to access the networks so they can see who are graduates of the Program in their part of Gippsland—because it's such a big place, Gippsland.

Program Results

All graduates and current participants interviewed identified benefits for themselves, and some spoke of tangible benefits to the community from their participation in the program.

Diversity

The diversity of the topics and issues presented and the diversity of the backgrounds of the people in the program were considered to be key success elements. For example, two participants said:

One would expect me in my position to accept different views, but I tend to be narrow-minded politically. This course exposed me to people with views significantly different from mine and I found that I liked the people! I think it has taught me that people with diametrically opposed views to me are quite intelligent and articulate. How I see the world is just not the same as how others see it. So now I seek out views that 12 months ago I wouldn't have.

The personal development for me was to become more tolerant.

Learning

The Community Leadership Program is clearly meeting its mission statement 'to provide a forum for communication and learning between established and emerging leaders':
I've certainly learned a lot about Gippsland.

[It] broadened my understanding of the Gippsland region and the diversity of issues—more than what my normal work would have done.

I learned about different people in the community. I'm learning to be more tolerant, to see the bigger picture.

I learned so much from other people in the group and from the speakers.

The program manager added:

The comment 'I didn't realise' comes out a lot in the evaluations. I think they gain a better understanding of people and the community that they didn't even know existed. And I think that opens their eyes to a lot of things that are unfair in the community.

Confidence

There is also evidence in participant interview transcripts of a growth in confidence:
I am now able to speak in public with much more confidence and I think that I listen better.

It gave me more confidence in my job.

Initially I thought, 'What am I doing here, I don't fit in', looking at the people and their titles. It took a while but I am more confident in public speaking to large groups. Now I take the plunge and speak out, standing up and saying how I feel.

Networks

By entering the program the leaders become part of the

alumni network, in part because of the group solidarity deliberately created by promoting group cohesion and confidentiality, and in part because, as an organiser explained,

... there is no competition: they are not trying to outdo each other. When they walk into that room, they don't have the high profile any more; they are just another participant. Although they've got the experience, they don't have the same authority, whereas back in the workplace, people have got expectations of them and they'd be controlled more.

Through the alumni they get potential access to all of the other networks which connect their peers to the Gippsland community. Asked to name the most important outcomes they included:

...expanding networks and knowledge.

...on-going networks. I often pick up the phone and talk to them. It's broadened my perspectives.

...increased networks and linkages as a group and individually. I've used the networks if I've had a problem.

The importance of networks is well understood by sponsors. One remarked:

I felt that it was exciting that these people were Gippslanders, going to do networking—getting together with others and working for the community. The community desperately needs some leadership.

Trust

Trust was a word that arose spontaneously from current participants, program management and alumni. A program sponsor observed, 'They see each other and greet each other like members of a family.'

Some examples of responses valuing trust from the current group:

I am more confident and competent to trust myself.
Rural communities are generally conservative in opening up. If you are introduced by someone then they can trust you.

I have learned to trust myself and be honest.
You develop a sense of trust in a group like this: bonds and friendships are built.

Alumni made some similar observations about trust:

There is a level of honesty and trust in the Program: personal and professional trust. People are trusted. It restored my faith in people coming through. It's not an MA in Business Management that is going to make a good leader.

There's a high level of trust between the people ... mainly due to the time we spent together building relationships and confidence. With our group we still meet every two months.

Benefits for the community

Ongoing financial support from, and participation by, the community confirm its value - 20 people nominated for the 25 positions in the last program before it was advertised.

Direct contributions

New contacts, increased confidence, or a broadened perspective of individual participants have had flow-on effects to communities:

There are youth development things occurring with the police now in the region that would never have occurred without the linkages that were created within the Program.

Many first- and second-year alumni are involved in supporting a Youth Leadership Program where Year 10 students are taken over a week through an intensive program on leadership processes.

Two of the people in our group got together to organise a mentoring program. Someone from Monash Uni has linked up with a high school principal in the region and started up a program where international students are mentors to students in secondary schools.

I'm opening a chapter of [a professional organisation] in Gippsland. What it has the potential to do is bring together disparate professionals in the industry and hopefully we'll get together in forums and meet. Hopefully it will result in overall improvement in skills and knowledge amongst the professionals here, which will of course benefit the community. Without the confidence I got from the Program, I would never have gone and tapped on the door of the Branch Executive of the Australian...Society.

It's certainly given me more confidence to do other

things with the portfolio I have on the management board of...For instance, we're actually talking to a similar group [to ourselves] that delivers the same kinds of prevention programs. We're just starting to work together, to talk about forming a combined entity and seek funding for that new entity to run those programs.

Participation in the program prevented the departure of at least one community member:
One graduate who has a lot to offer to Gippsland actually decided to stay in the area because of what he got out of the Program. He had been thinking of leaving because the future didn't look too good. From the Program, he got a better understanding of Gippsland and of himself. He's developed new networks, he's going to change the ownership structure of [his] business, and he's decided to consolidate in Gippsland.

Indirect contributions

Indirect contributions stem from improved leadership performance in the workplace, whether it be in paid work or voluntary work, or in the private or public sector.

Firms and non-profit organisations can benefit financially from networking during the program. Profits keep people in the area and create more job opportunities. One proprietor acknowledges the value of the program to business:
The people I have met and the contacts I can make now compared to before is amazing. There are lots of CEOs' doors I can go and tap on, senior management people in all business sectors. Even if I don't know them, I know someone who can give me an introduction or contact...We're thinking of expanding. So I called up some alumni in that area who straight away gave me five to six names of people I needed to meet.

Indirect benefits also stem from better decision-making processes in the workplace. Participants cite many instances of improved consultative processes as they seek a more diverse range of opinions on issues. Their world views have changed in ways that make their problem-solving approaches more comprehensive. Here is an example of a public sector manager who intends to change certain practices in his department:
It will be much more about engagement with community and with industry, taking a more holistic approach to issues. For example, in something like a flood or drought response, we'd probably traditionally focus on just looking at the impact on a particular sector: say, the farming community, and deal with that. I would certainly be much more inclined now to make sure that we would have a more holistic approach which would bring much more of a social science and social type issues into any sort of response. Because the linkages and interactions are much clearer to me now—you really do need to look at things in a very holistic way rather than necessarily dealing with a single issue.

Standing back

This portrait is the tenth and last in this collection. The two themes running through all ten are *community*, and the *contribution of ACE to community* through generation of social capital.

We used "community" to conceptualise the different collectivities that constitute larger communities we call a town, a city, a region or even a society. Two extensions of this concept are 'communities within communities' and a 'community-of-communities'. These constructs suggest the interconnectedness and interdependence of groups that together form larger groups and so on. They help make clear why it is that the wellbeing of a community, however defined, is dependent on the wellbeing of its sub-communities or co-communities. The focus of our first portrait for example, was the learning community located at the Ballarat East Community House, a sub-community of Ballarat. In the last portrait, the Gippsland Community Leadership Program takes a broader notion of community to mean all the towns and townships that comprise the region of Gippsland in East Victoria.

All ten stories tested and verified the assumption that the Adult and Community Education Sector (ACE) generates benefits for individual students, for the larger group(s) to which they belong and for the wider community.

There is abundant evidence that the Gippsland Community Leadership Program expands community wellbeing. The program's impact on *all* the OECD areas of community wellbeing rests in its strategy to develop the social capital of the region by developing its leaders. Leaders working in all community sectors from all over Gippsland, form 'mini-communities' in which the norms and values of a learning community are

quickly established - trust, respect, new knowledge and ongoing interactions that challenge and support.

The Program's capacity to affect all areas of community wellbeing as defined by the OECD rests in its strategy to develop the social capital of the region by developing its leaders. It does this by bringing together leaders working in all community sectors from all over Gippsland, to form 'mini-communities' in which the norms and values of a learning community are quickly established. Trust, respect, new knowledge and ongoing interactions that are both supportive and challenging, all provide participants with opportunities to learn.

By working with community leaders this program works with influential social capital builders in business, the public sector and the volunteer sector. Leaders are well positioned to harness the resources of the whole community for the good of all. After four years, the impact of Gippsland Community Leadership Program graduates on communities is tangible.

1 SCOPE Quality Learning Inc. 1998, *Annual Report*, p. 3.
2 Gippsland Community Leadership Program, 'How does it work?', p. 2.
3 ibid., p. 3.

CONCLUSION

Building communities: ACE, lifelong learning and social capital

Of course, if I did not belong—feel this is part of my life, never would I give back.

(Migrant participant and volunteer tutor)

The ten portraits of this study capture adult and community education at work, turning everyday learning in educational programs into social and economic benefits. The ten exemplars are not in a class of their own. They typify ACE. Their achievements are repeated in hundreds of ACE organisations across Victoria.

The data comes from interviews, observations, documents and videos, and was used to construct accurate accounts of the perceptions of the respondents and the contexts in which they were formed.

We set out to document data in patterns that make new meanings for familiar situations. The ten portraits have few surprises for those who know the ACE sector well. Put together they make a new pattern for all to see the genius of ACE in social capital construction.

This research in no way 'proves' that ACE provision always raises socioeconomic wellbeing. The research merely confirms that ACE can and does do that in at least ten different but complementary ways in the ten sites examined here.

A common question at the end of a research project is: 'What have we found out? What is new that's come out of this project?'

So what have we learned that's new?

First: ACE contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities

A socially strong community lays the foundation for a strong economy. Where individuals are connected and re-connected to their society through social links, there are economic as well as social benefits. As Table 2 in the introductory chapter shows, in every one of the ten cases, ACE impacts on some or all of the OECD indicator bands of socioeconomic wellbeing.

In Hawthorn educationally disadvantaged older people learn to trust their ACE colleagues, and engage in activities that enhance their health and wellbeing and reduce reliance on health services. In Colac businesses come together in training networks. More training happens more cost effectively. Elsewhere learners commonly develop the self-confidence and self-esteem to successfully seek productive work.

The study shows that social and economic benefits of ACE are inseparable. They are mutually embedded. Attempts to focus on the economic to the exclusion of the social, or the reverse, are artificial and not supported by the reality of ACE. There is no example of an ACE program that produces economic outcomes alone, or social outcomes alone. Social connectedness comes first; socioeconomic benefits follow.

Second: ACE builds social capital

Social capital involves the building of social values, networks and trust. In every ACE site these elements are richly present. ACE learning builds social capital at the meso level (groups, networks and community) and at the micro, or individual, level. ACE's capacity to build social capital at the macro, or broad societal level, was not investigated.

ACE builds social capital at the meso level. The meso level of communities includes groups such as organisations, firms, clubs and associations (formal and informal), as well as voluntary groups. Here ACE expands social capital by calling on existing networks and by generating new networks or connections. A community

owned and community-based provider has no other option but to work in this way. Social capital production is the *modus operandi* of ACE not a by product.

When it calls upon its existing networks, the ACE organisation strengthens those networks by activating them. Relationships are reaffirmed, common values are reinforced, and the contact stimulates the network to again work together for the common good. A network of connections 'on paper' is not a network of connections 'in practice' unless it is active. For example, the African Women's Project called in known community groups and agencies to help implement the program.

More often, judging by the evidence in the ten stories, the ACE organisation is the catalyst, agent, trigger or facilitator for new networks or connections whose outcomes can go beyond those resulting from the initial intent of those involved. Consider the Brunswick Aboriginal Community Elders Service and the Hawthorn Community Education Project, as well as the leadership networks in Gippsland and the industry training networks in the Colac district.

But what exactly is the nature of the ACE provider's contribution to these networks? It is this: ACE magnifies the *capacity* of networks to generate positive outcomes. Knowledge, teaching expertise, financial resources, governance experience and management skills are part and parcel of ACE organisations. ACE appears to bring them to networking in a spirit of generosity because ACE is committed to the common good. As well ACE brings to other networks its own connections, including connections to funding bodies. Finally, it tries to share ownership of processes and outcomes with other stakeholders. Colac ACE knows how to do this very well indeed with the local busniess community. Each ACE organisation appears to do this very well, in its own way, in its own environment.

ACE builds social capital at the micro level. At the micro level, ACE helps build social capital in individuals and families through education. Through their involvement in ACE, students enter networks, help create new networks and extend their connections. Individual and family benefits translate into community benefits. ACE creates the conditions that encourage individuals to develop the building blocks required for social capital to grow. These building blocks are trust, norms and relationships. The portraits reveal trust as a prerequisite for the self-confidence needed to risk reaching out into existing networks or creating new ones. ACE programs generate an environment that encourages self-confidence and self-esteem. In ACE collaborative and inclusive planning, building identity, building trust and building reciprocity, strengthens socioeconomic wellbeing and social cohesion.

Third: ACE promotes lifelong learning

Every one learns, more or less, all their lives. Lifelong learners identify as learners. They seek out education and are aware of what they learn, how they learn and why they learn. ACE 'goes after' educationally disadvantaged adults who would never think of taking on organised learning unless encouraged by others, and would never otherwise think of themselves as learners. In Hawthorn and Cobram adult educators set up informal social situations to make contact and coax reluctant adults into the ACE fold. ACE fosters self-consciousness about the learning process. This is a hallmark of lifelong learning.

Identity building is also about connecting the learner with community in meaningful and positive ways via pathways to further study and work. ACE helps make these connections by developing identity resources and knowledge resources shown in Figure 1 of the introduction to this study.

1. In Colac employers redefine their identity. From sole operators - with limited capacity for training – they become collaborators in a supportive training network with strong bargaining power.

2. In Maribyrnong women expand their sense of self as refugees of a particular country (e.g., Eritrea, Ethiopia) to include an exploration of commonality with women of a particular region (Horn of Africa). In so doing they move towards a sense of themselves as Australians. As Horn of African women they act more broadly to build connections with the Australian community. Identity, knowledge and community twist together indivisibly.

3. Migrant women in Cheltenham redefine their identities from outsider to insider in the Australian community. Their voluntary work at the Neighbourhood House and in other community organisations proves the point.

4. Leaders in Gippsland are asked to shift from narrow perspectives of their immediate community membership to become citizens of the region and the world.

5. In Ballarat the Internet lets adult education students form communities with people who have common educational ground with them but who live far away. They too have a taste of what it might be like to be a citizen of the world.

In all these examples we see the links found in ACE experience between learning, identity transformation and connection to community.

Fourth: Language and literacy practices are a vehicle for transformation

The way language is used is fundamental to success in ACE community development. Networks are only as good as the quality of the linguistic, literate and non-verbal communication used to establish and maintain them. The literate practices, spoken, written and non-verbal, used by coordinators and teachers are the very mechanisms of transformation.

Through language and literacy, Eritrean and Ethiopian women learn new identities to their benefit and to the benefit of the community as a whole. Language and literacy establish links with the outside world. The links are trustingly re-established, not through classes and a ten-week course funded fleetingly, but through the persistence of staff with historical connections, vision for future possibilities, and continuity of employment.

At the two Koorie sites, Koorie language shapes cultural narratives and transfers values from generation to generation: historicity is at work in the interests of future visions.

In Colac networks are established and maintained by quality communication between provider and businesses free to take new directions as required.

In Bendigo young people use their language practices to reinforce their emerging trust and confidence in each other, repairing their bruised esteem, readying themselves to move on.

Two Cheltenham women experience English language short courses that don't serve them well. Later, at Cheltenham Neighbourhood House they are surrounded by language and communication practices reflecting the values of the House and they begin to discover their strengths.

Principle of Interconnectivity

Effective ACE outcomes are dependent on the *Principle of Interconnectivity*. To a greater or lesser extent, all cases of ACE in this anthology demonstrate that desirable outcomes are achieved through developing learners' capacities to connect to information, other people and their communities in meaningful ways. ACE practice strives for continuity of connection over time, with learners and the wider community. It values interconnectedness in human experience and its narratives. In social capital parlance this is *community connection* and *chronological continuity*.

Individual and community transformation co-evolve over time like water spreading slowly over a flood plain. Where funding chops in and out, sometimes leaving students and staff in limbo, continuity of staff and programs is destroyed. Destruction of healthy, viable, forward-looking infrastructure is hardly value for money.

Discontinuities lose a lot of shared history between participants and ACE provider.

When the depth of history shapes a vision of the future social justice uses the terms 'historicity' and 'futuricity'. To optimise outcomes, ACE needs a 'fit' of past, present and future that does not waste human, physical and social infrastructure.

The *Principle of Interconnectivity* requires enabling leadership to foster interconnections between participants and enhance community capacity. ACE organisations work with students, not on them. ACE leaders build trust as a stepping stone to both utilising existing community networks and building new ones, as they are needed. ACE then sets about helping participants enter networks.

If ACE puts individuals at the centre, what surrounds them? From a social capital perspective they are inside a web of interconnectivity, woven between more intimate, trusting networks and the communities beyond.

The following diagram attempts to capture the elements of the *Principle of Interconnectivity*:

Figure 3: *Principle of Interconnectivity*

The figure suggests that ACE might want to locate its success as much in the activities that connect people with other people, resources and places, as it locates them in the inner lives of the individuals.

The established social capital literature clearly shows that building social capital enhances economic outcomes[1]. This study, however, has taken this a little further by showing *how* this occurs in a series of focused exemplars in which learning interactions are the goal. Learning occurs as people's trust is gained, and then (casually) develop the preparedness to move outside physical, intellectual, social or cultural comfort zones. The subsequent benefits, though a longer time in coming because of the aspect of continuity inherent in the *Principle of Interconnectivity*, can flow to whole communities and society at large.

The research suggests that new terms might be used to expand an understanding of ACE learning and its transformations on socioeconomic wellbeing. Whether transformations appear to derive from, or happen to, people, curriculum, programs or community, they all involve transformation of people's identities. This finding is likely to have applicability to other sectors.

The language needed to describe dimensions of individual and community transformation wrought by ACE include:

- identity (which includes a sense of belonging);
- self-confidence and self-esteem (self-efficacy);
- trust;
- common purpose;
- balance of internal and external links (bonding and bridging ties);
- reciprocity;
- networks; and
- social cohesion.

Words like 'self-confidence', 'self-esteem', 'trust', and 'social cohesion' might at first sight appear to be at odds with a public accountability system framed largely by a sector that has a different education perspective to ACE. Across the ten portraits, people do indeed value the vocational education and training opportunities they have, but this is only a relatively small part of a much broader (and important) picture. What they most strongly value is their increased capacity to connect with their communities.

This observation is meant to be read with a sense of urgency. Politicians and strategists *know* that the old systems and assumptions are flawed. Vocationalism is still based on an out-moded concept of industrialism. Industrialism dealt with large numbers of people, mass-production lines and regimented processes and structures. Its legacy for education includes evaluation based on body-counts in classes, in idealised course and program contexts, divorced from the experiences and needs of real people in real communities in both urban and rural areas. ACE needs to be freed up to measure social and economic outcomes in a social capital framework.

What do we still have to learn?

Transformation of identity – from one view of self to another – is made possible by ACE. The study has shown that fostering transformation in a climate of continuity, and with respect for holistic connections can contribute positively to socioeconomic wellbeing. Further research, policy initiatives and professional development should explore ways of expanding the individual and the common good.

Language, literacy and communication practices build trust and transform identity over time. Yet little research exists which examines how these practices connect with identity re-fromation and the development of trust. For example, how do those who are not natural-born 'networkers' acquire these skills?

The power of culturally-embedded language and literacy practices lingers in residual traces of the culture of school-based communication and traditional pedagogy found in some sites. A decade of research in literacy, learning and community education, shows one attitude

standing out above most others - negative attitudes to 'schooling' acquired from formal schooling and training. Adult participants report that these attitudes have damaging effects on their return to learning in adulthood. An in-depth study of communicative practices in adult and community education that build trust and help change identities could help establish objective benchmarks for professional standards in the sector. It might also cast light on the reasons why ACE, with a workforce comprising mainly women, is so good at social capital construction.

Policy makers should note that the continuity of physical, human and social resources is cost-effective. Research might establish the core of essential physical, human and social resources that enable ACE to operate at its most cost-efficient levels.

Conclusion

It was only fifty years or so ago that the idea of 'human capital' was put forward and defined. Now it is widely used to refer to skills and knowledge resources in an organization or community. Like the idea of human capital, the idea of social capital is a response to converging and changing social circumstances that are not explained fully by existing concepts. Although social capital has been named and discussed for 80 years, the concept was not accepted into the everyday vocabulary of managers, policy-makers and academics until the 1990s. It is a concept whose time has come.

If the world is our oyster, the pearl is our attachment to place—our geographic communities. Grief over contemporary Western societies' loss of community is observed everywhere. While the memory of community may be partly mythical and romantic, while we may gloss over the drawbacks of closed communities (reputed to be one of the reasons for high youth suicide in rural areas, for example, especially among gay youth), the sense of loss is real enough. Pressure on Indonesia from East Timor, Aceh and West Irian Jaya—and the fracturing of the USSR into its original states – seems to be driven at least in part by grief over loss of identity and a determination to recover it.

In all the portraits, local identification is clearly a strong influence on people's contribution to their communities. We share and help shape a macro 'cultural' level of identity around what it means to be an Australian and a citizen of the world. We share and help shape a meso level of identity from participation in medium sized groups with a common purpose. We share and help shape micro levels of identity formation found in one-to-one interactions in which individuals reciprocate through language and communication to construct their sense of self.

Notions of identity permeate talk about people's first tentative steps in building trust then stepping out. The African women brought their macro cultural identities, which had warring histories of their countries of origin embedded in them. Reconciling these inherited identities through communicating with the ACE provider promoted the acceptance of new and constructive identities at a broad 'Australia' identity level. Meso identities are evident in the way groups of people use their collectivism to 'gather their strength' like the women in Cobram, early school leavers in Robinvale and the disadvantaged youth in Bendigo.

So to conclude, can we legitimately say that ACE contributes to community? Yes, we can. Can we claim that ACE produces social capital? Yes, we can. Do we also know more about how ACE achieves these outcomes? Yes, we do. We have now seen many instances of how ACE achieves these outcomes.

A note of caution about the use of social capital as a filter for understanding ACE is needed. A filter is a filter. It can be changed for another filter to look at things in a different way for a different purpose. The anthology has presented each and every portrait of ACE through the filter of social capital. We believe it has been useful to see how impacts on social wellbeing are made, to use this filter as a practical tool in monitoring and improving policy and practice. But in the end it is up to the on-site participants, policy makers and other readers to ask how useful such a filter has been and could be.

In short, there is in these portraits evidence that ACE can transform people and their communities through the development of social capital. Purposeful and identity-building interactions show the world what we are, as well as what we need. They support our lives in a web of elastic networks. Interactions are the mechanisms for defining and, in the portraits present here, *redefining* who we are. Redefining identity is the fundamental learning process in any transformation.

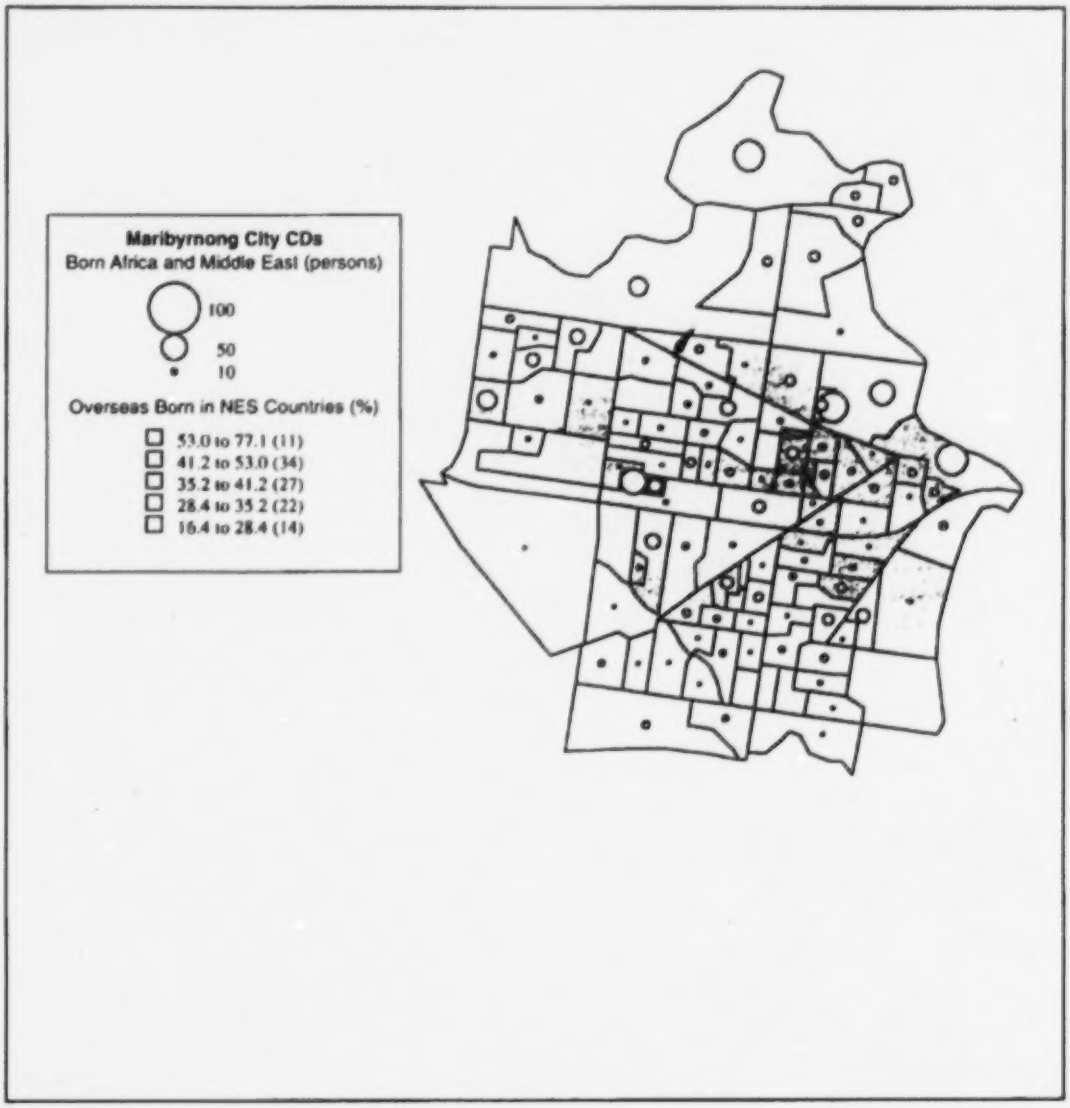
1 Woolcock, M. 1998, 'Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework', *Theory and Society*, vol. 27, pp. 151–208.

Appendix

Demographic maps

MAP 1: DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE BOR[illegible] AND THE MIDDLE EAST, MARIBYRNONG CITY

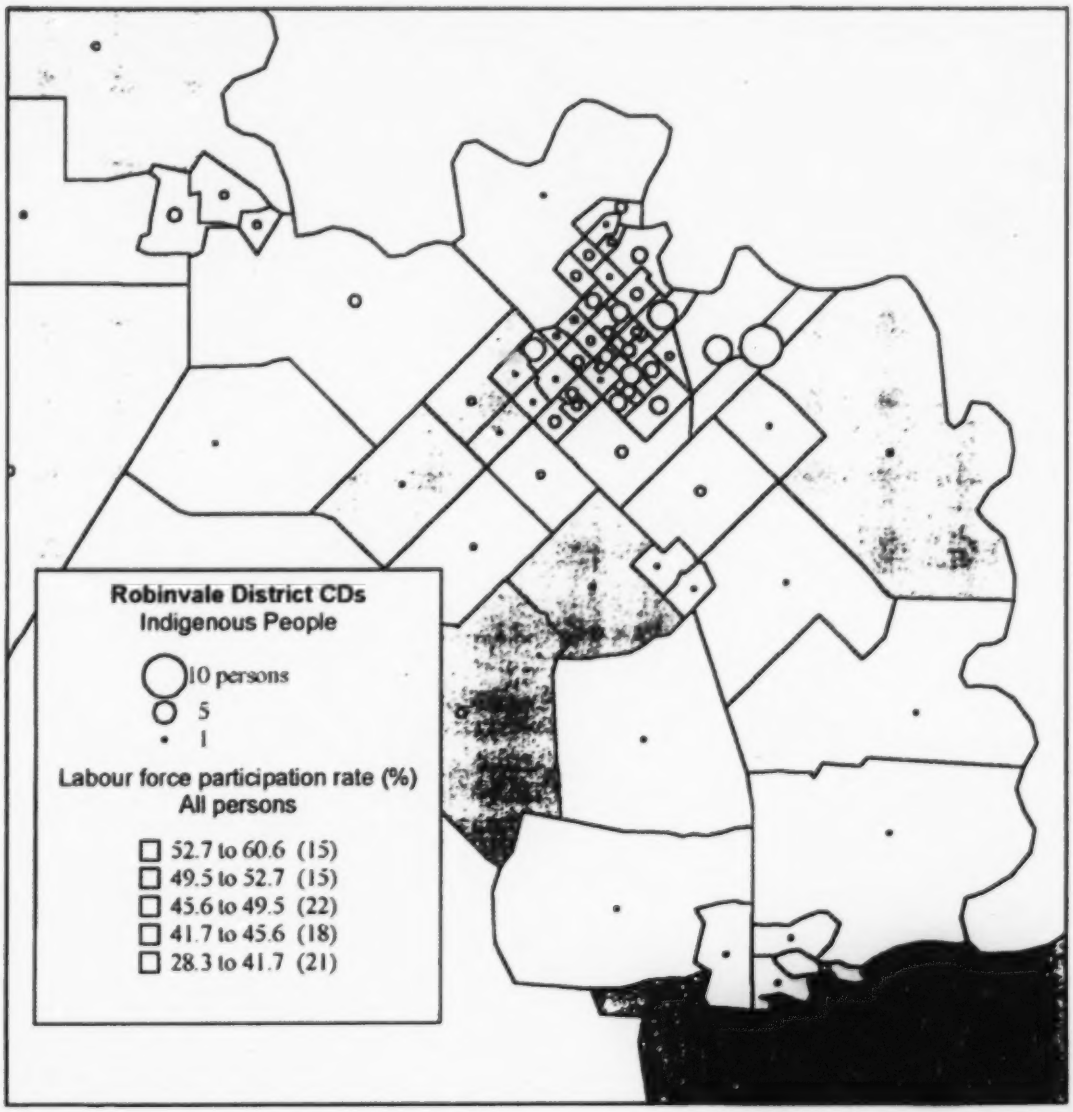
The Maribyrnong city Local Government Area (LGA) has neighbourhoods (CDs, census collection districts with about 200 people in each) with large proportions of people born overseas in non-English speaking countries (see Melbourne, Map 5), including significant numbers in those areas of people born in the Middle East and Africa.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MAP 2: KOORIE POPULATION AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION, ROBINVALE DISTRICT

The Robinvale district has areas that varied markedly in the level of labour force participation in 1996. The town centre (in the north-west of the map adjacent to the Murray River) has rather lower levels than the surrounding farms which may have, for example, most members of the family working. The town has significant groups of Indigenous people, comprising up to 10% of the neighbourhood in some cases, though labour force participation in these areas is quite varied.

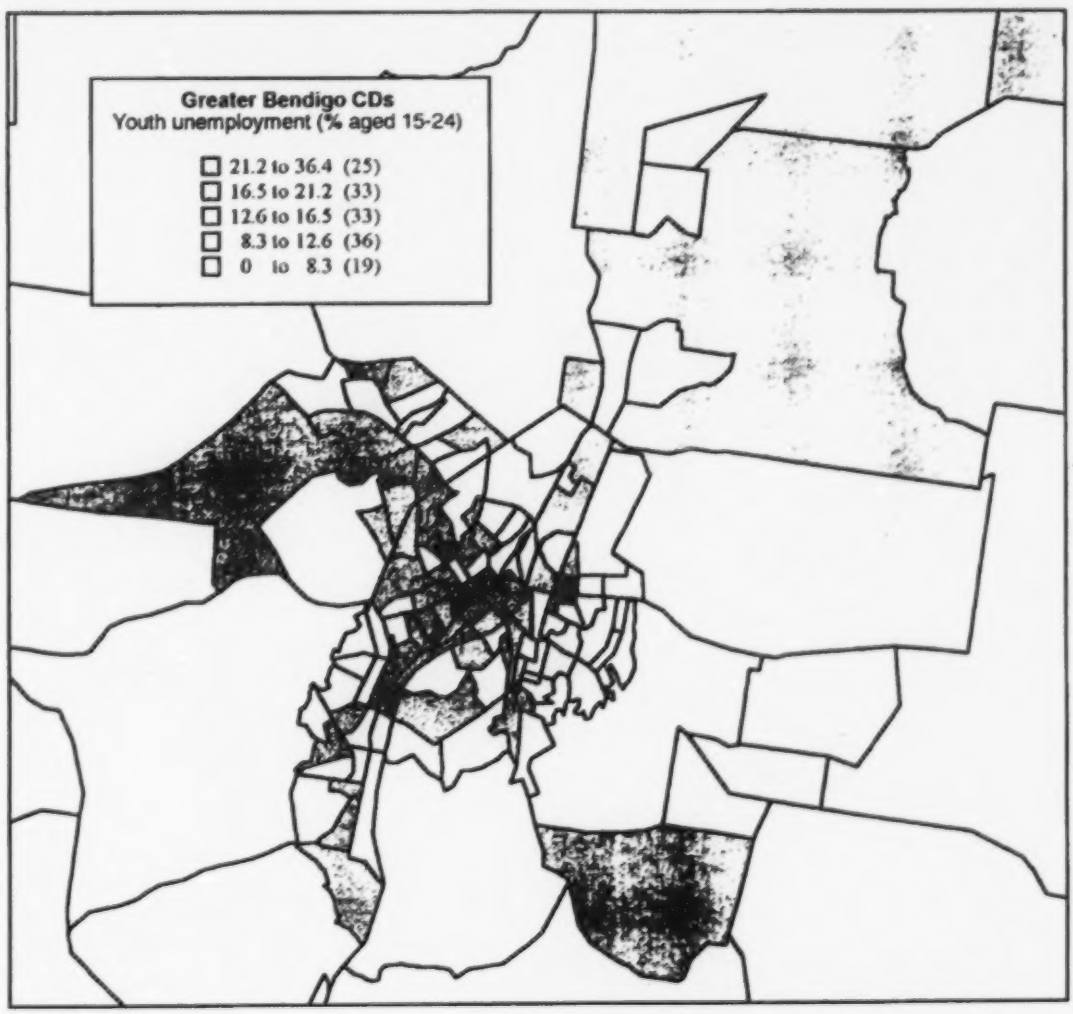


Adult Education in the Community

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MAP 3: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN BENDIGO

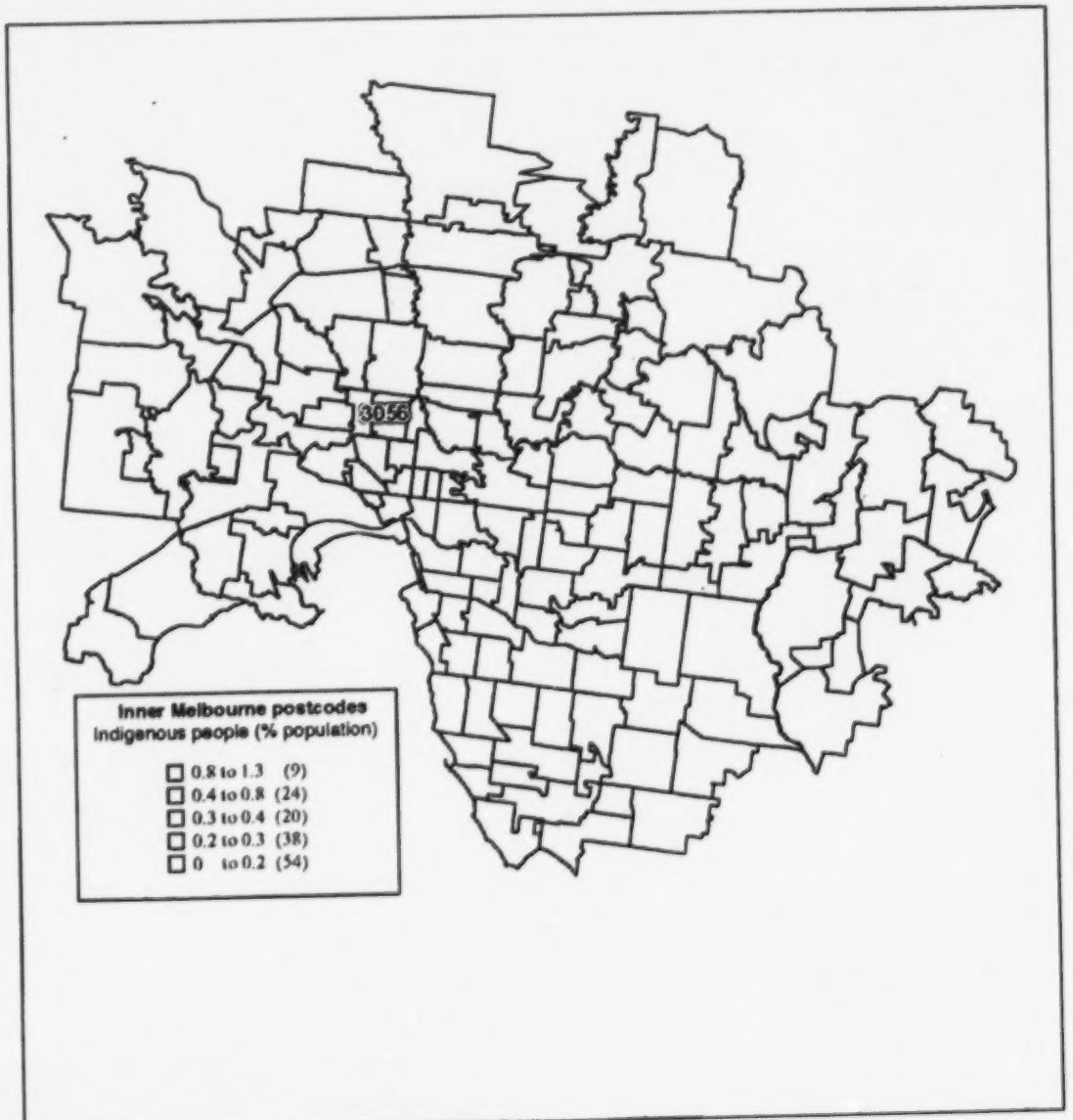
Youth unemployment in the City of Greater Bendigo at the 1996 Census (unemployed aged 15 to 24 years as a proportion of the total 15–24 cohort) presents a striking patchwork of social difference. Some neighbourhoods have very high youth unemployment, including a large area north of the city proper, where Future Connections is located. Highest unemployment is in areas adjacent to the Calder Highway on both sides of the city and in the Eaglehawk area.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MAP 4: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN INNER MELBOURNE

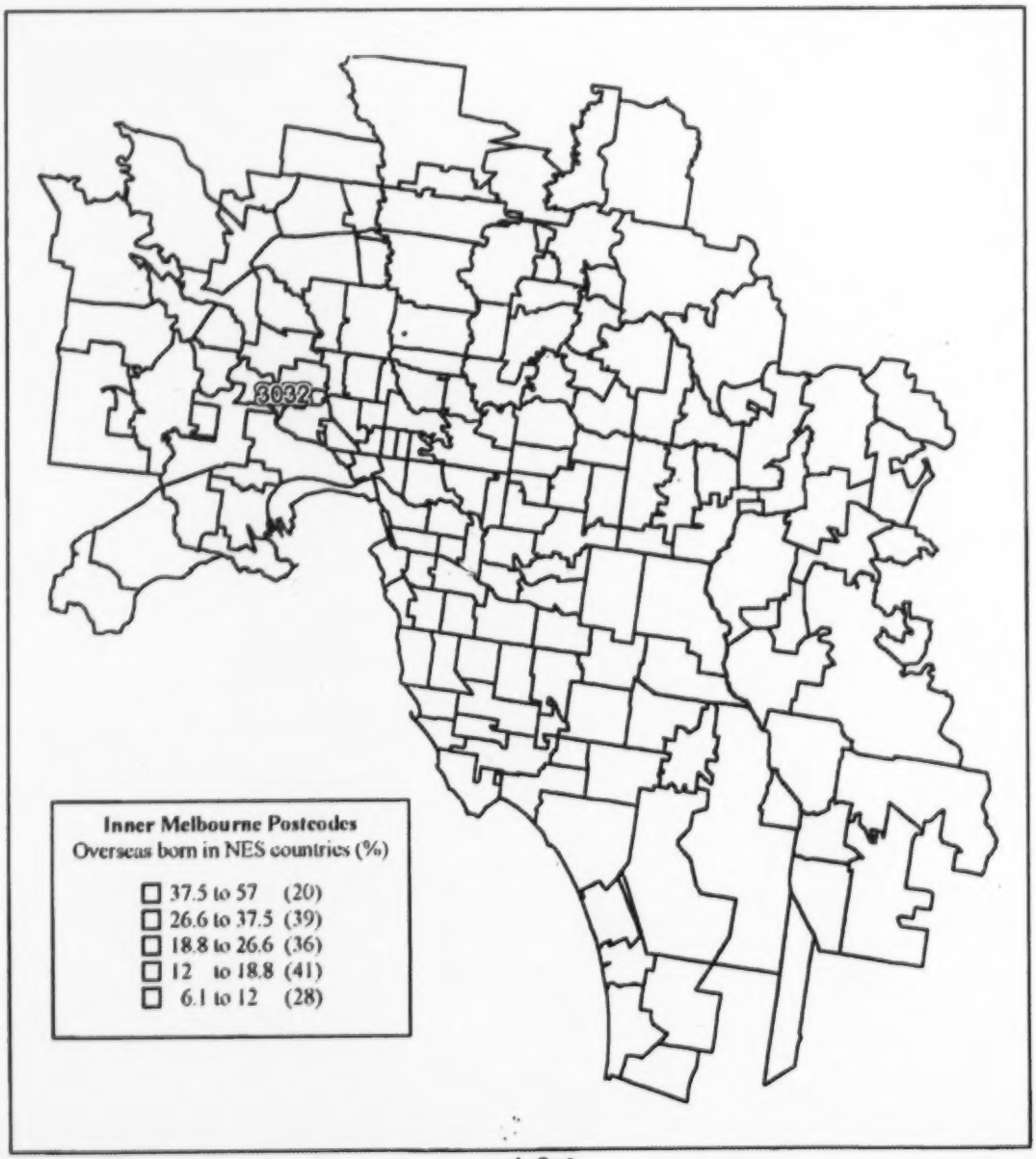
Compared to other Melbourne postcodes, there were (in 1996) relatively large numbers of Indigenous people residing in the postcodes adjacent to Brunswick (3056), particularly a belt of postcodes running north-south including Northcote and Preston.



MAP 5: OVERSEAS BORN POPULATION FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES, MELBOURNE

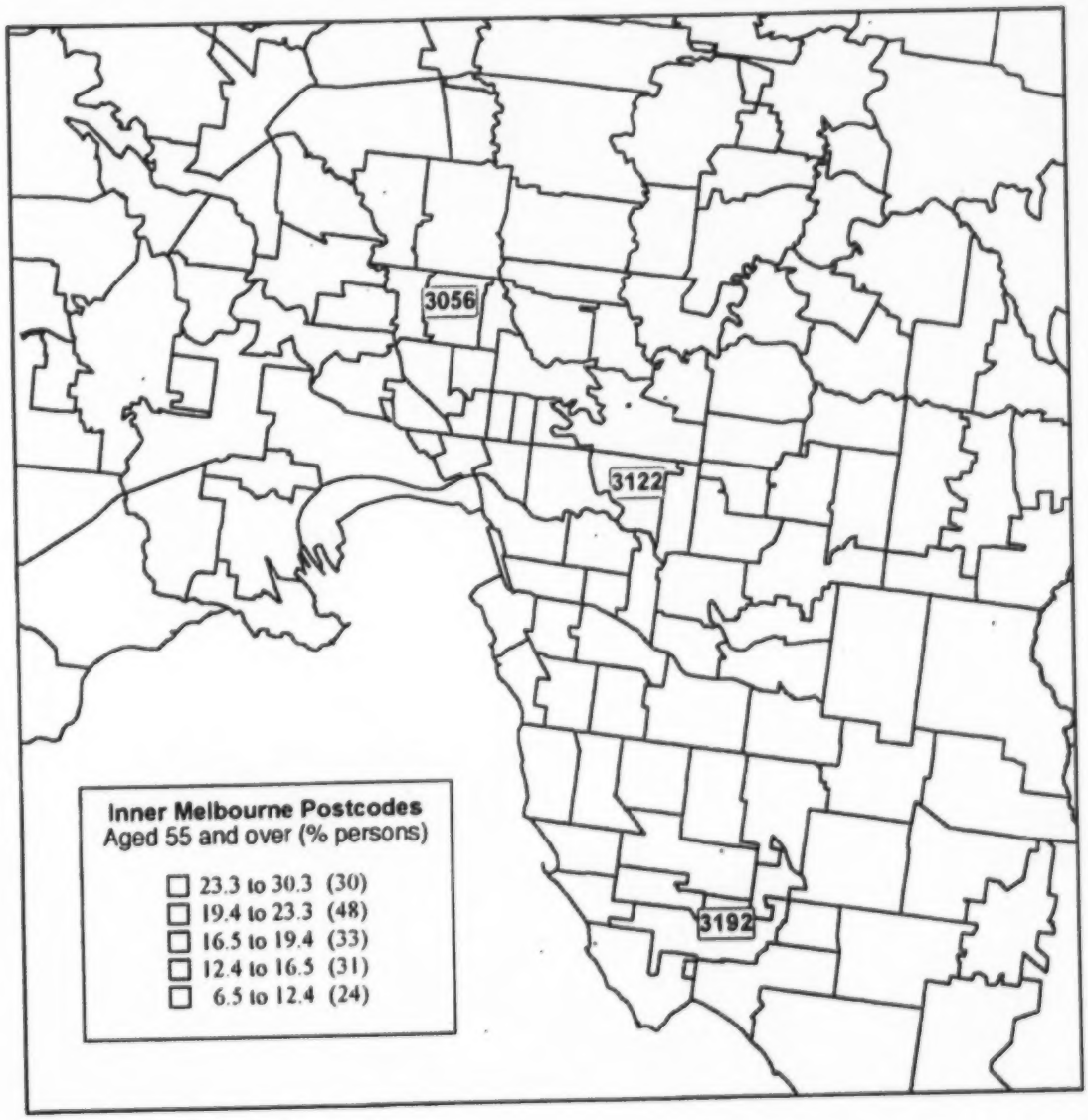
Cheltenham (see Chapter 7) as well as Maribyrnong 3032 (see Chapter 2) at the 1996 census had quite a high proportion of people born overseas in non-English speaking countries. Adjacent postcodes in Melbourne's west and others in eastern Melbourne had higher levels of overseas-born people from non-English speaking countries.

In close-up, Maribyrnong City has neighbourhoods with concentrations of people born in Africa and the Middle East (see Map 1).

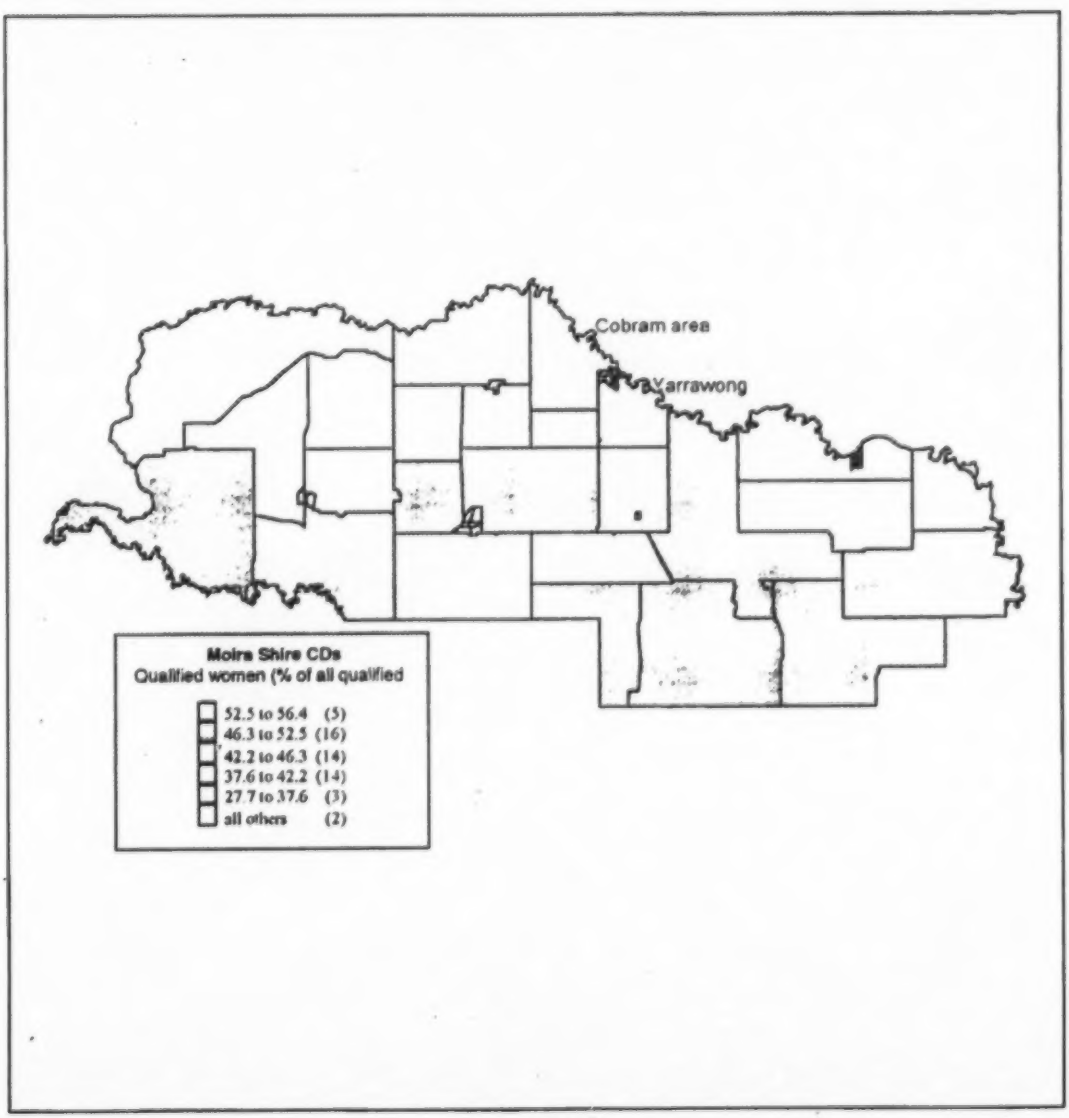


MAP 6: DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE AGED OVER [illegible] IN MELBOURNE

Hawthorn (postcode 3122) has a moderately high proportion of people age over 55 (see Chapter 8). However the highest concentrations of older people are located in an annulus around the north and eastern edge of Melbourne, including the area north of Brunswick (see Chapter 6). A high proportion of older people are also located in the Cheltenham area (see Chapter 7).



MAP 7: QUALIFIED WOMEN IN THE COBRAM AREA

The Moira Shire borders the Murray, and includes the Cobram, Yarawonga and Numurkah postcodes (3644, 3630 and 3636). When the Shire is broken down into collection districts (CDs), these areas differ quite notably on various indicators.

One of these shows the extent to which Cobram and areas west have low proportions of women holding any post-school qualification, as a proportion of all qualified people. In these areas, men have the major share of all qualifications, whereas in other areas (darker colours), qualifications are evenly held by both men and women.